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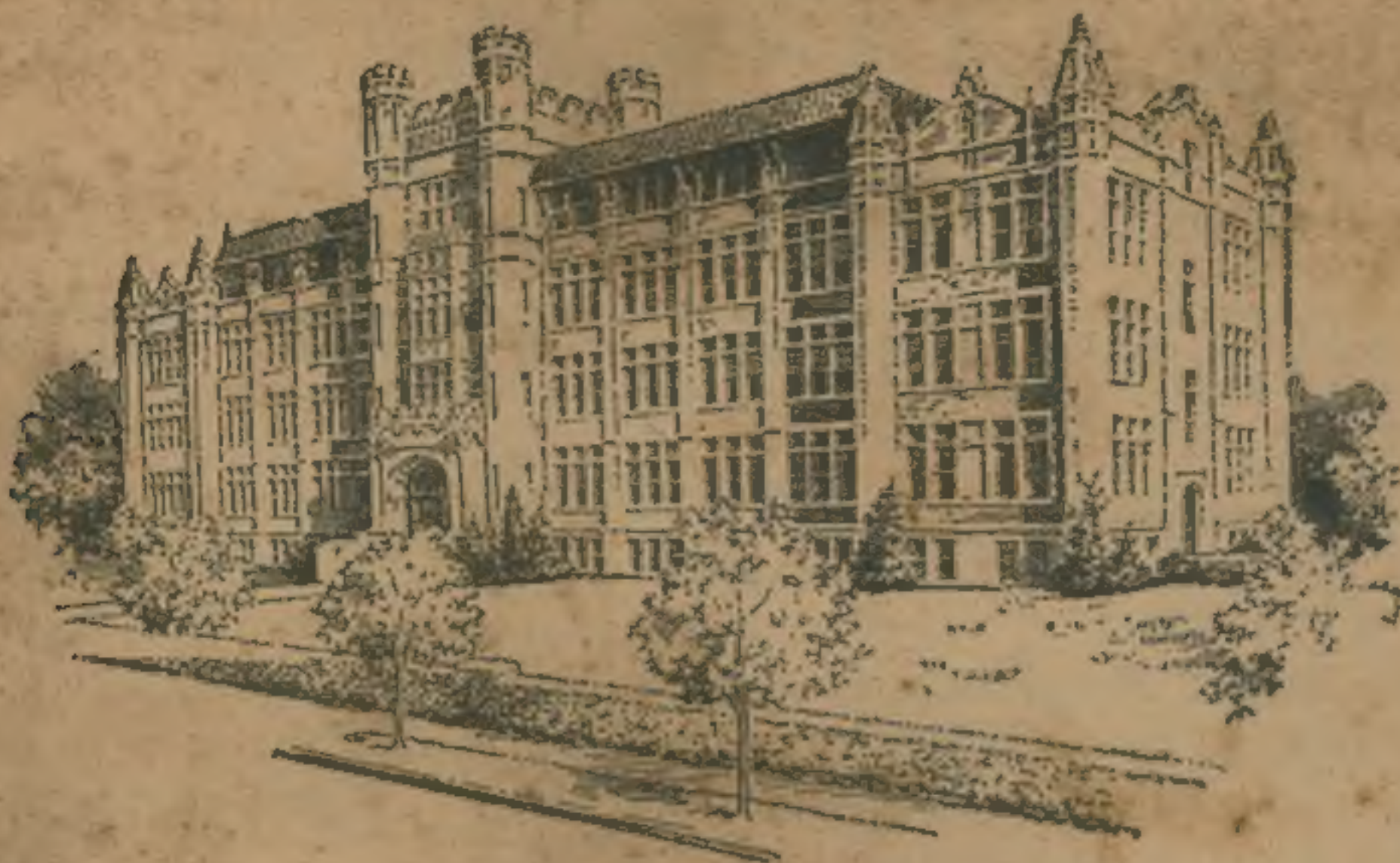
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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1929

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"I don't have any off days," she told him. "I'm cooped up here all the time"

He'd Be His Own Son

Larry Kane rides cheerfully into a trap that is to change the whole course of his checkered career

By GARRET SMITH

Author of "Thirty Years Late," "The Girl in the Moon," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS GIRL.

LARRY KANE trembled with elation as the bank teller pushed the yellow bills across the window counter. He drew a deep breath to steady himself under the fishy eye of the teller who looked as if still in doubt

about the identification insisted upon before cashing the young stranger's check. Then, with deliberate nonchalance, he counted his money.

Twenty-five yellow boys! Five hundred dollars! More money than Larry Kane had ever seen before in one pile!

Casually he thrust the money in his pocket, lit a cigarette as he walked out,

then paused at the door and stretched his six feet of lithe youth to full height. He stroked his blond mustache with approval. That mustache had been a great asset. He had raised it just before coming to this Western city of Palington a year ago. It had concealed the fact that he was a scant eighteen years old at the time. That mustache, along with certain premature lines in his face, left by his hard boyhood, had won him a man's job. He was thinking of all that now.

"At last, by gosh, I'm going to play, just this one night, before I settle down to work again," he assured himself as he went down the steps.

Again he paused, took out the roll of bills and counted them once more. From the lot he extracted one yellow twenty. The rest he stored away in an inside vest pocket. Holding up the remaining one, he addressed it.

"Sorry to tear you away from your other little playmates," he said. "I know how you feel. I've been lonesome myself for a good many years. No more chance to play than you have. Well, by golly, to-night you're goin' to help me play and find somebody to play with. Just this one night, then I go to work again harder than ever and your little brothers will have to help me work. So you're lucky at that."

Years of loneliness had given Larry Kane this habit of talking to himself. He went on with further details of his plans as he put in his trousers' pocket the bill devoted to this epochal night of pleasure. Halfway to the sidewalk, he suddenly stopped again.

"I wonder if she would?" he mused. "And I wonder if I dare."

He stood there irresolute for several moments watching the Saturday noon throngs on their way to half-holiday relaxations.

"I believe I'll make a try," he decided finally. "She can't kill me for trying."

THIS settled, he stopped at a lunch wagon and swallowed a sandwich and a cup of coffee. Then he hurried off, turning into one of the main residence avenues two blocks away. Presently he came to the half-built apartment house on which he had been employed as a carpenter for the last three months.

But this call was not one of devotion to his work. He barely glanced at the shell of a building to be. Stepping quickly over piles of lumber and stone, he made his way to the rear of the premises and to the temporary board fence that protected the adjoining property from the ruin of construction.

Arms akimbo on the top of this barrier, he leaned against it and gazed into the neighboring garden, a slow flush mounting his temples. Nor was he any more interested in the comfortable stucco mansion sprawling in the center of this garden than in the scene of his own handiwork behind him. His uneasy gaze rested on a comely young woman seated on a rustic bench surrounded by three wriggling youngsters. Manifestly the young woman was in charge of the trio. It was equally clear that her job was not altogether a labor of love. A petulant frown marred her pretty dark features.

"I suppose it does get on her nerves, tendin' three lively kids day in and day out," Larry thought. "But they're nice kids at that. Some day I'd like some just like 'em. Maybe I will have, ten years or so from now, if those yellow boys and I work hard enough."

He patted the slight bulge on his chest where the roll of bills lay. And at that moment the young woman

looked up and saw him. Her frown gave way to a coquettish smile.

"Hello, Mr. Carpenter," she called.

"Hello, Miss Nurse," he hailed back.

"It's the hammer-man," exclaimed the oldest of the trio of her charges, a boy of five.

"What are you doing around here Saturday afternoon?" she demanded. "All dressed up and nowhere to go, eh?"

"Wrong. All dressed up and ready to go. I was sort of planning to drive up into the hills some time this afternoon and maybe have dinner somewhere up there with somebody and get in a moonlight drive afterward. But, listen, I'm not Mr. Carpenter in off hours. Kane's the name I go by, off duty—Larry Kane for short. Maybe—uh—you've got another name, too."

"No," she told him. "I don't have any off hours. I'm just Miss Nurse seven days in the week and also Saturday afternoons. You lucky fellow, to have a whole day and a half off. But don't let us keep you."

"That's what I'm here for," was on Larry's lips, but wouldn't come out. He wasn't used to talking to girls. He didn't know this one, though he had seen her daily now for three months and for a good part of that time had exchanged nods and an occasional word across the fence as he worked. While he was still hesitating, the boy caused an interruption by stumbling over a shrub and bumping his head on a boulder. The two small girls joined in the following howl. Their caretaker had her hands full at once.

"Let me help you," Larry offered, and without waiting for permission, vaulted over the fence and picked up the boy while the young woman nagged the others into quiet.

"There, there, ol' man, we'll put a grass poultice on that bump," Larry told the injured one, squatting on the ground and seating the boy on his knee. "Ever see a grass poultice? Works great."

Peace had been restored and Larry was displaying an intricate combination pocket-knife to the boy when a cold voice broke in on the absorbed party.

"Alice, don't you intend to bring the children into luncheon? And what's all this uproar about? You seem to be entertaining callers rather early in the day."

Larry looked up disconcerted. He recognized at once the owner of the voice as Horace Lane, the master of the premises. He was a cocky little man, known as a sportsman, a financier of sorts and a power in local and State politics. Larry had disliked the man from his first glimpse of him across the fence some weeks before. Also, he had been given to understand that Lane was a dangerous man to offend.

LANE was glaring at him pointedly now. The children had fallen in to awed silence. Miss Nurse, whom Lane called Alice, was eying him with covert sullenness. Larry clambered awkwardly to his feet.

"Who's your friend, Alice?" the older man demanded with sarcastic emphasis.

"It's the hammer man," the small boy explained.

"Hammer man?" Lane raised supercilious eyebrows.

"This is Mr. Kane, Mr. Lane," Alice introduced.

Lane acknowledged the introduction with an indifferent nod, leaving Larry's involuntarily extended hand sticking out foolishly in the empty air.

"This is no time to be entertaining

your intimates, Alice. Get the children in and let Mr. What's-his-name go back to his hammer. I'm driving over to the country club for the afternoon and evening. See that you keep them indoors for the afternoon. We'll have no more howling for the benefit of the neighbors."

Alice flushed with rage and started to speak. Larry, his own quick temper flashing up, interrupted.

"The young lady was not entertaining an intimate, Mr. Lane. The boy got hurt and I came over for a moment to help her. I won't trouble you again."

Lane turned his back in contemptuous silence and started for the garage, from which the chauffeur was running a gaudy sports car.

"Thanks for helping me," Alice said to Larry and started for the house with her charges.

"Alice, I want to speak to you," Lane called from the garage.

"Well, what is it?" the girl asked impatiently and to Larry's surprise merely paused and waited. To his further surprise, Lane glared and then came to her.

"Go in the house, you kids," Lane ordered and then when he was alone with the girl, spoke to her in a low tone.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," she said emphatically after a moment and turned her back on him. The man glared after her for an instant, then went back to his car. Larry suddenly realized that in his surprise he was standing watching something that was none of his business. He went on to the fence.

But, once more on his side of that barrier, Larry could not resist the temptation to look back. Lane was just driving out. The girl was standing on the steps of the servants' en-

trance looking Larry's way. Distinctly he saw her wink and beckon with her head. Then she disappeared in the house.

"Well, I'll be darned!" Larry exclaimed. "Wonder what it's all about. Queer way for a hired girl to treat her boss, even if he is a bum. Why doesn't she quit and be done with it? And does she mean for me to wait?"

He decided to wait and see what happened. For half an hour, he squatted on a lumber pile where he could watch the Lane house without being too conspicuous. Then Alice reappeared, clad in something that looked like an old linen duster of early automobile days. She disappeared in the shrubbery at the rear of the grounds without a glance in his direction.

"Now what?" Larry wondered. "Well, I'll go see."

He followed down the line fence and presently came upon her, well hidden from the house by the dense shrubbery. And she was so completely transformed that Larry gasped. The duster had evidently been camouflaged for an attractive sports suit worn underneath it, for that drab covering lay discarded under a bush. She was in the act of adjusting on her wavy dark bob a hat in keeping with the suit.

"HELLO," she greeted him. "I've run away. If he thinks I'm going to stay shut up all the afternoon with those brats, he's got another guess coming."

"Quit your job?" Larry asked.

"No such luck. No, I'm just taking the afternoon and evening off while dear Mr. Lane plays at his club and a well-bribed chambermaid looks after the kids."

"Good for you, Miss Alice Nurse," Larry chuckled.

"Miss Alice Pomeroy, on my afternoons out," she corrected him. "Alice for short."

"Fine!" Larry approved. "Then perhaps you wouldn't mind—sort of going along with me on that dinner and moonlight drive."

"Larry Kane, you're a good guesser. When do we start?"

"I'll have a bus around in half an hour."

"I'll meet you in Northrup's drug store, two blocks down on the back street here," she agreed.

Thrilling with this new adventure, Larry hurried away in quest of a car. That would be easy, involving no inroads on the sacred twenty-dollar amusement fund, excepting for gas. Larry had done a number of favors outside of hours for the boss carpenter on his job. In return, the boss had told Larry he could have the use of his second machine some time when he wanted to go on a holiday drive. Larry had been too busy, up to date, to take advantage of the offer. It would come in handy now.

But at the boss's house he met with a setback. The family were away, gone for an afternoon drive, he inferred from the empty space he saw through the window of the locked garage. The second car was there and Larry had a switch-key for it, but there was the locked door and no one around to open it or give him permission to take the car.

Then temptation lifted up a seductive head. The garage doors were fastened by a bar on the inside. To get in one entered by a padlocked rear door. But he found one of the windows latched loosely and with a little manipulation, got it open.

"He said I could take the car, and he won't care when I bring it back and

explain," Larry reassured himself and a few moments later he drove off, his conscience smothered under the prospect of a rare afternoon and evening with the bewildering Alice Pomeroy. It was a good-looking motor, better than he could have afforded to hire, and now he could devote the whole twenty to the rest of the entertainment.

But Larry Kane would hardly have driven off so light-heartedly if he had realized that it would take him twelve years to pay for the use of that borrowed car.

CHAPTER II.

A WRECK IN THE NIGHT.

"DO you know, Mr. Larry Kane, there's some mystery about you. You're not an ordinary carpenter!"

This arresting statement from Alice Pomeroy broke the silence for the first time since he had picked her up at the drug store and turned the car toward the open country. Startled, Larry let his glance fall for a moment on the profile of the girl beside him. There was a perplexed frown on her face. He laughed a little uneasily.

"And do you know, Miss Alice Pomeroy," he mimicked, "there's some mystery about you. You're not an ordinary children's nurse."

The girl in her turn was distinctly startled.

"Why do you say that?" she demanded, facing him squarely.

"Why do you say I'm not an ordinary carpenter?" he parried.

"Because you don't look like one. You seem nicer and more intelligent than some I've seen."

"Oh, that's nonsense," Larry protested. "I'm not. I suppose I ought

to return the same compliment, but you see, I never knew any other nurse to compare you with. You certainly seem very nice and intelligent, but you somehow don't seem to like your work and I didn't know a nurse would dare treat her boss the way you treat yours."

"I hate my job and I hate my boss," she declared heatedly.

"Then why do you keep your job?"

"I have to live. I can't quit it till I find the job I'm looking for."

"What job is that?"

The girl smiled tauntingly.

"That's part of the mystery about me. I can't tell you that."

"But I should think Mr. Lane would fire you if you always treat him the way you did to-day."

"That's another part of the mystery. He doesn't dare."

Larry was a bit uneasy. What sort of a girl was this, anyhow? She seemed to read his thoughts.

"Don't worry about me. I'm not a villainess. Let's talk about you instead of me. I dare you to clear up the mystery about yourself."

Larry was challenged. He was not given to talking about his brief, checkered career, but there was something compelling about this girl. To his surprise he found himself wanting to tell her everything.

"As a matter of fact, there's no mystery to speak of about me," he said, "though I haven't told many people some of the things I'd sort of like to forget. My father was an architect, but he married when he was only twenty, before he'd got a start. Then a year later I was born and my mother came down with T. B. at the same time. We went out to Arizona to live, in a shack miles from anywhere. When I was ten, mother died, and by that time dad had the disease, too. We stayed

on a little while, then dad and I drifted across country in a car. One day when we were out on the road alone, dad fell off a cliff into a river. I never even found his body.

"I thought then and I still think he did it purposely. For fear other people would think so, I didn't tell anybody about it when I found my way to a village at last. I told them I was fourteen, so I could go to work. Dad had given me a pretty good education, taught me himself. I got a job helping a carpenter. I've been at carpentering ever since. But I've been studying architecture nights. A man got me to do a job for him evenings since I came here. I just got my pay for it and I'm going to use that as a stake to start out for myself, planning and building houses. That's about all."

"You poor fellow!" Alice Pomeroy exclaimed when he had finished. "You certainly have had a hard time of it. How ambitious you are! I can't tell any such heroic story. About all there is to it is that my father and mother are both dead. I've been with the Lanes ever since mother died three years ago. So now we know all about each other, let's play," she wound up with a gay laugh.

SHE slipped into a merry mood that presently banished all Larry Kane's doubts. He decided that he liked this girl just as much as he had been thinking he would ever since he first saw her three months ago. By the time they were facing each other across the dinner table he was sure of it. It was on an inn veranda overlooking a wide valley, glowing first under the rays of the setting sun, then becoming a mysterious vale of enchantment under the full moon. Larry's enthrallment was complete.

It was near midnight when they left the inn feeling very well acquainted indeed. Alice settled into the car seat, leaning thrillingly against his arm, one little hand dropped lightly on his knee. "I don't want to go back ever," she whispered.

With brief daring, he caressed the little hand on his knee; then threw in the gear and they rolled off down the moonlit highway. Many miles farther on, at a bend in the road overlooking the valley, his companion sat up suddenly.

"Let's stop here and enjoy the moonlight for a little," she suggested. "Draw off under those trees and turn off the lights."

Larry obeyed and as they stopped she settled back against him again. His arm went around her naturally, and as naturally she turned her lips to his.

They had been sitting there for a little time in blissful silence when they heard a car approaching slowly up the grade from Palington. A moment later there came the sound of another motor coming at high speed from the opposite direction. The girl straightened up and moved over to her end of the seat with sudden primness.

"Their headlights might show us up; it might be somebody who knows me," she said.

The first machine swung around the bend. A scant rod from them it suddenly stopped.

"Good Heavens! They've seen us!" the girl whispered, opening the door at her side. "It may be somebody looking for us. I'm going to get out and hide."

"Looking for us! Why should they be?" Larry demanded, but she slipped away into the shrubbery without reply.

But the others were apparently merely turning around. Larry started to

call to the girl. At that instant, however, the car from the direction of the inn dashed around the bend at reckless speed. Its headlights showed the Palington car lying squarely across the right of way, a figure of a man on the running board waving them to halt.

There was a grinding of brakes. The oncoming motor swerved sharply to the right to avoid the obstruction. With a rending crash it struck Larry's darkened car head on.

Larry was hurled forward through the windshield and into a bush beyond. He felt a sharp twinge of pain across his face. Half stunned, he picked himself up and clapped a hand over his injured face. He staggered around the front of the hood to see what damage had been done to the others.

"Hands up!" shouted a harsh voice.

Larry saw now that the man on the running board of the obstructing machine wore a mask and was pointing an automatic at the newcomers. One man was climbing out of the car that had just struck. He put up his hands obediently and at the same moment faced Larry silhouetted by the headlights.

"I can identify you!" he shouted. "I saw you at the Cremona Inn to-night."

There was a pistol shot, a scream and another hoarse command. Larry dodged back, stumbled and fell. Then his senses left him.

CHAPTER III.

FRAMED.

WHEN Larry Kane came to himself again, he was alone. Not only had the bandits departed, but apparently their victims' machine had not been so badly damaged but that

they, too, had been able to get away. His first thought was of Alice Pomeroy.

"Alice!" he called, but only the night breeze in the foliage answered. Again and again he hailed her with the same result.

Then suddenly he sat down heavily, overcome with a horrible thought. Had she been in league with the bandits? Had she deliberately led him there to be robbed, guessing that he had his little fortune with him? Hastily he felt of the inner pocket where he had hidden the yellow bills. To his great relief, they were still there. At any rate, the robbers had missed him.

His eye fell on the wreck of his boss's car and his heart sank again. Repairing that car might wipe out all his little stake. And he was responsible for the damage done to the others, in a way. He had been parked without lights. Then he remembered that one of the victims had identified him and taken him for a bandit. For that matter the auto number would give him away. Oh, he was in a pretty fix as the outcome of his one night of play!

But why had the girl vanished? She had said something about being recognized. What did he really know about her anyhow? She had picked out the Cremona Inn for a place to dine, had selected the road they had followed afterward and the place where they had stopped. If the bandits' victims had dined at the inn, perhaps she had overheard them say which way they were going.

His head pained him acutely, and his face was smeared from a bleeding nose. Exploration with his finger tips revealed a deep gash across the bridge of that organ and indicated that it was broken besides.

At first he feared he had been hit

by a bullet, but he found nothing save the cut from the broken windshield. His other bruises were slight. There was just one thing to do. Alice had deserted him. He had better get to the nearest doctor and have his injuries attended to.

"Let's see if that old bus will run," he suggested, and turned to the car. But a brief inspection showed it was hopeless. He was in for a walk, and no knowing how far.

Then he heard Alice calling his name. At first her voice was faint in the distance, but at the sound of it all his suspicions were forgotten. With a thrill of relief he hurried toward her. A few minutes later he found her, feeling her way around in the dark woodland well off the road.

"I got lost," she explained. "I heard a crash and then shots. So I ran, and couldn't find my way back."

She leaned on him, weak and trembling. All compassion, he led her back to the car, telling her what had happened.

"Oh, good heavens!" she exclaimed as she comprehended the situation. "I've lost my home now, all right, and I'll never get another job. My reputation will be worth less than nothing after to-night. We won't get back till long after daylight, and we'll be mixed up in all the publicity of this holdup as well!"

She sank to the running board of the wreck and burst into tears. Larry, who had been surreptitiously wiping off his bloodstains with his handkerchief, having refrained from telling her the extent of his injuries, stopped and for a moment regarded her dim figure. Larry had been brought up in the way of the old school. How was he to know that there were many modern young women who would regard such

an essentially innocent escapade far less seriously?

According to his code, a gentleman could do only one thing under the circumstances; nor was his duty an unpleasant one. He threw away the bloodstained handkerchief and sat down beside her.

"Listen, Alice," he said. "You don't need your job any more, and you needn't worry about your reputation. I'm crazy about you. Will you marry me as soon as we can find a minister?"

"Of course I will," she whispered. "I've been crazy about you ever since I first saw you."

Through what remained of the night they sat in the car linked in each other's arms, awaiting the dawn. All the rest of his life, in retrospect, that night was a blurred, hazy memory, a mixture of tumultuous emotion and almost panic fright at this responsibility that had been so suddenly thrust upon him.

In all their talk of their common future Larry was again and again uncomfortably conscious that his wife-to-be avoided all reference to the past. She volunteered no more about herself than the brief summary she had given him early in the evening. He feared to ask her pointed questions.

AT sunrise they left the car and started down the road in the opposite direction to the inn where they had dined. Alice suggested this move.

"I think there's a little village a few miles down the road, and I hope they haven't heard about the robbery. I don't want our wedding day spoiled by a lot of unpleasant publicity, so let's get away from that car as quick as we can. There'll be some meddlesome

constable along any minute," she worried.

"I must find a garage as soon as I can, and get that car fixed," Larry told her.

"Indeed you won't," she snapped irritably. "Bother the car. We won't go back till people have forgotten about the robbery."

"But I borrowed the car," Larry told her. "They'll trace it to me by the number."

"We won't worry about that till later," she decided for him, and, a little nonplused, Larry forbore to press the question further at present.

They reached the village just as the church bells were ringing for early service. Larry had sought out a spring in the woodland and washed the bloodstains from his face and clothing. With skillful applications from her vanity case Alice had concealed the recent nature of his cut.

"You certainly are a sight, Larry Kane," she told him. "You don't look much like the man I thought I was promising to marry in the dark. Your nose is all out of shape and almost as big as the rest of your head. However, I can't back out now."

She laughed and kissed him, and again Larry forgot his misgivings. They attended services at the village church and after the service waylaid the minister.

Alice did the talking. "We're with a camping party up in the hills, and have been engaged for some time," she told him with pretty mendacity. "We went out for a walk this morning and decided to surprise our friends by getting married a little ahead of time."

Fortunately this was a State which did not require a previous marriage license, and the clergyman was not averse to Gretna Green weddings.

With his wife as a witness he quickly performed the ceremony and sent them on their way with a duly signed marriage certificate.

At Alice's insistence the newlyweds took the noon train for a mountain hotel fifty miles away. "I've heard the Lanes speak of it, and I always thought it would be a great place for a honeymoon," she told him.

"Well, what of it?" he demanded of himself. "I can't be stingy on my wedding trip. I didn't expect to shoot my stake this way, but I'll just have to get another one. It's as much hers as mine now. I hope I can hold out enough to get that car fixed. I'll phone the boss about it first thing in the morning, whether she likes it or not. Have to let him know I'm laying off the job anyhow."

LARRY KANE did not phone his employer in the morning. He arose before Alice and went out to find a barber before breakfast, intending to get Palington on the wire before he returned, and say nothing about it to Alice.

Other customers were ahead of him in the hotel barber shop, so he passed the time of waiting by looking over the morning paper.

At first glance this headline stared at him from the front page:

**ROAD BANDITS KILL ONE; ANOTHER
FATALLY INJURED**

Victim Recognizes Larry Kane, Palington Carpenter, Among Murder Gang That Holds
Up Auto Party on Mountain Highway
Near That City Saturday Night

**CAR KANE STOLE FOUND WRECKED ON
SCENE OF CRIME**

For a moment the little barber shop went black, only that bank of lurid

type standing out in Larry's vision. Then he shook himself free of his brief panic and looked up. It seemed to him that every eye in the shop was fixed on him.

He had the feeling of a trapped animal. His thoughts flew to his bride waiting for him upstairs, the girl who had been so sensitive to publicity. Had she some premonition of this hideous mistake? Of course he could clear himself at once, but what a mess to mix her up in!

But he soon convinced himself that he was not attracting undue attention among his fellow patrons and the barbers. The desultory chatter went on around him as before; they were not discussing the robbery. Possibly none of them had read the morning paper yet. With a supreme effort at nonchalance he began reading the damning story that followed. As he read the circumstantial details his panic grew on him again.

The three uninjured survivors of the party of five bandit victims agreed substantially as to their story, based on a mixture of misleading circumstances and the naturally confused impressions of frightened men. As they were well-known business men of good standing in Palington, not given to excessive drinking, and their sobriety was vouched for by others at the inn where they had dined that evening, their story had been taken at its face value by the authorities.

That evening the five men had dined late at a table near the young couple whose absorption in each other had attracted their amused attention. The couple had left the inn about an hour before their party. When the five departed they had started for Palington by a roundabout route to enjoy the moonlight.

Suddenly they had swung around a bend and came upon two cars parked, one directly across the road, the other beside it. In trying to avoid the first they had hit the second.

One of the five who had leaped to his feet when he saw the crash coming was hurled over the windshield. As he picked himself up he was faced by the young man he had seen at the inn. Then there was a pistol shot, and the young man had dodged back and disappeared.

They saw nothing of the girl. Masked men rifled their pockets of some three hundred dollars, besides watches and other jewelry; then their assailants fled in the car that stood across the road.

They found that one of their number had been badly injured by the collision, and that the other had suffered a pistol wound. One died on the way to the hospital in Palington, and the other was still in a critical condition.

The three men who were able to tell their story agreed on a description of Larry Kane that was fairly accurate, and all were positive that he was one of their assailants. The police had picked up the car next morning and identified it as the property of Larry's employer, Frank Cable, of Palington. Mr. Cable asserted that Larry had stolen the car; made no mention of his having offered to let Kane use it. His next-door neighbor, who knew Larry by sight, had seen him taking the car out Saturday afternoon, but supposed he had permission. Cable reported that his garage had been broken into.

FORTUNATELY no mention was made of the runaway marriage nor of Alice herself. That had apparently not been discovered when this account was written. Yet her employ-

er, Lane the politician, was mentioned as taking an active part in spurring the police to find Larry.

"We must make an example of this young thug," Lane was quoted as saying. "It is time the citizens backed up the authorities in wiping out this plague of banditry."

Larry dropped the paper and got up. "I can't wait any longer," he told the barber, and went out.

He meant to keep Alice out of this, if possible, while he cleared up the ghastly mistake.

He avoided the lobby and the main stairway on his way back to their room. Perhaps even now his name had been discovered on the register, though the night clerk who had admitted them was off now, and Larry had not yet faced the day clerk. To be sure, he had registered himself by his initials, L. R. Kane, in his not too legible hand, and the connection between that and the wanted Larry Kane might not be noted immediately.

Larry's injured face had given a little handicap to identification by strangers reading the newspaper description.

At length, dreading the ordeal of breaking the news to his wife, he reached the door of their room unchallenged. A moment he hesitated before it. After all, however hard she might take this unpleasant publicity, she knew he was innocent, and her testimony, if nothing else, would free him from this fantastic suspicion. He threw open the door; then he paused, startled, on the threshold. She was not there. He saw, too, on second glance, that her hat and handbag were gone. She had just stepped out for something; perhaps was waiting for him in the lobby, he told himself as he closed the door.

Yet he felt a new uneasiness. What if she had bought a paper and read the story before he could break the news to her?

Then he saw on the dresser a copy of the same paper he had read, a black pen-line underscoring the headlines. Beside it lay a hastily scribbled note. He seized and read it:

LARRY:

I don't know how much of this is true, but at least it is evident you stole the car. What a fool I've been! Of course I'm leaving you, hoping I'll get away before they catch you. There's still a chance I won't get mixed up in this. I couldn't stand that. Why should I share your disgrace when you've proven yourself a thief?

I found your money under your pillow where you left it. I have taken it and will see that it gets to the owner of the car. That's the least I can do. Probably you stole that, too. Don't try to see me again. Just get away quick if you can. I suppose you cared something for me as you said or you wouldn't have married me. If you did, don't ever admit I was with you. Of course the minister will report our marriage, but I'll try to get that hushed up. Anyhow, I'll swear I wasn't with you at the time of the robbery.

Don't imagine you could stand trial. Mr. Lane has it in for you and he'll see that you're convicted, whether you are innocent or not. I couldn't help you even if I stood by you. Oh, Larry! Larry! I was really crazy about you, even if I did have a mercenary motive in marrying you. Good-by forever, my bandit lover.

ALICE.

For a long time Larry Kane stared at this amazing, bewildering note. What did she mean by a mercenary motive in marrying him? Why was this stranger, Lane, so determined to convict him? But in spite of these mysteries it was clear that he was hopelessly caught. He could gain nothing

by going back to Palington and fighting the charge.

All at once he knew he never wanted to see this strange girl again. His brief infatuation was dead at her own hands. She had even stripped him of his money. Ruefully he drew from his pocket a lone twenty-five-cent piece, all the money he had in the world.

A peremptory knock at the door interrupted him. Larry stared at the resounding panel for a moment in silence; then he stepped swiftly and quietly to the window from which a fire escape led down to the rear grounds of the inn with thick woodland beyond. Larry slipped out the open window and down the single flight of iron steps unseen. A moment later he was speeding away in the shelter of the forest.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG-OLD WANDERER.

A YEAR later, and two thousand five hundred miles away, a bearded man of uncertain age walked slowly and appraisingly down a quiet back street of the flourishing city of Flowerville, New York. He was studying the numerous signs stating that room and board could be had at moderate rates within the shabby-genteel houses.

The stranger's appearance was in keeping with the street. His clothes were decent, evidently once of good make and material, but now showing signs of much wear and mending. His hair and beard were in need of a barber. A broken, twisted nose gave him an almost sinister appearance. His face bore signs of exposure, suffering and recent illness. He might have passed easily for a man of forty. No one but

a close intimate would have recognized the Larry Kane of a year ago.

But suddenly this impression of age was belied by a flash of boyishness in his fine gray eyes. He stopped and stood stock-still, gazing at the weather-beaten old house that was labeled No. 19. For several minutes he stood there without moving or taking his eyes from the moth-eaten premises.

Two small boys playing catch in the middle of the street, a graybeard poling himself along the sidewalk with a heavy blackthorn cane, a yellow pup chasing a sparrow—all paused to see what might have attracted such marked attention on the part of the stranger.

To begin with, his rapt interest in this ramshackle old house caused doubts as to his mental balance, in the minds of his three human spectators at least. Even the yellow pup sniffed his trouser legs and looked up speculatively, like an alienist examining a subject.

No. 19 had seen better days a long time ago. Its once stately porches sagged like the jowls of a dropsical old man. The spotted, peeling paint gave it a complexion in keeping. It was an eyesore even in this decadent section of Flowerville.

Nevertheless the stranger showed signs of unmistakable admiration. A moment longer he studied it blissfully. Then he let his much-labeled suitcase fall with a thud and smote his thigh resoundingly with the flat of one hand. The yellow pup dodged away in alarm.

"Oh, boy! What I could do to that place! Pure Colonial!" exclaimed the stranger.

Leaving the suitcase where it fell, he paced slowly back and forth the length of the ragged hedge fronting the house

like an untrimmed mustache. On the second lap he stumbled over the suitcase and fell full length.

"Damned thing!" he roared, jumping to his feet and kicking the suitcase into the middle of the street. The three humans cackled shrilly; the dog yelped and did a dance around the offending baggage. But the stranger had already erased the episode from mind. He was abstractedly examining the interior of a flat and flabby wallet he had removed from the inside pocket of his vest.

"It was there this morning, blast it!" he exclaimed. "Didn't I go without breakfast rather than spend it?"

Finally he turned the wallet upside down and shook it. A lone twenty-five-cent piece let go of the leather, rang on the sidewalk, and rolled into the hedge, the yellow pup after it. The man dropped to his knees and joined chase. There was a mingling of lurid language and yelps, and the man emerged, dragging the pup by the scruff of the neck by one hand and holding the quarter triumphantly in the other.

"That ought to be big enough," he remarked, holding up the coin lovingly. "Good little old good-luck pocket piece! Do your duty!"

"Hey, Joe, he's goin' to pay a quarter for the ol' Sturdevant house!" exclaimed one youngster.

"'Tain't worth it," the other demurred.

THE stranger ignored them. Crooking his forefinger and thumb about the retrieved coin, he entered the gate and advanced up the path leading to the old house, his eyes on the sagging ridge-pole. Half-way to the front door he paused, tightened his clutch on the quarter, and, fixing his eyes on the roof-peak, he

went through a series of gyrations like a baseball pitcher winding up before putting the ball across the plate. Finally he snapped his arm up and the little coin soared till it faded from sight against the sun-drenched skyline.

The stranger stared fixedly toward that vanishing point for a moment, then turned and ran diagonally through the deep grass of the dooryard toward the corner of the house, the two boys and the pup in hue and cry behind him.

He was brought up short against a high garden wall of tumbling brick, almost hidden by climbing honeysuckle. The solid oaken door of this wall was barred against him by a rusted padlock. Only a moment he halted; then, leaping up, he caught the top of the wall with his fingers and threw a leg over it.

The next instant he dropped on the other side, up to his shoe tops in the soft earth of a newly made flower-bed.

The scene around him was now in striking contrast to the front of the premises—a small but well-kept old-fashioned garden. He was conscious of a riot of floral color that warmed his artist's soul.

Immediately he perceived that this Eden was not untenanted. In the middle distance stood a slight figure in gardener's overalls and jumper, the head bent over something that lay in the palm of a soiled garden glove.

It was the other hand that betrayed the fact that this was a young woman. The glove had dropped from it and slender fingers were thoughtfully rubbing a pink oval cheek that a broad-brimmed straw hat barely revealed. The intruder hesitated for a moment, then advanced toward the girl. She

looked up, startled, then closed the gloved hand and hid it behind her back.

"How did you get in?" she demanded.

"Excuse me, miss," he apologized, "but I lost a piece of money, a quarter, and it happens to be all the money I've got, so I sort of need it."

"So you broke into my garden to see if you could find some more. Does this look like a place where money grows on bushes or something?"

She had a delicately pretty face, a nose that suggested impudence and independence, a chin not without hint of a strong will. The stranger delayed his reply while he covertly admired these features. Also he was being carried back painfully in his thoughts to another garden and his meeting with another girl there a year ago, a girl who had made him the hunted fugitive that he was.

"Did you speak?" she finally hinted.

"I—oh, no. I was going to say—that is—as a matter of fact, I threw the quarter. It fell in here."

"You are a strange person. I suppose you wanted to see how it would seem to throw away all the money you have in the world. And now you've found out and want it back."

"Does sound nutty," he admitted.

"Well, you ought to have thought about how much you needed it before you began playing catch or something with it. Over the fence is out, you know."

"Over the ridge-pole is in," he corrected her with a grin. "Matter of fact, I didn't throw it over the fence. I threw it over the house."

"Which, of course, makes it all right," she commented caustically, "particularly as your precious quarter hit me in the face and made a lump there as big as a hen's egg."

She removed her hand and revealed a red welt on her pink cheek.

"Gosh, I'm sorry!" he exclaimed. "I thought there was nobody around."

"So, of course, when one sees an empty garden, one just has to throw money into it."

THE stranger squatted on his heel and picked a blade of grass, chewing the end of it ruminatingly. "S'pose as long as I've made a fool of myself, I might as well explain," he began, with another embarrassed grin.

"You see, it's this way. I'm a carpenter, drifting around the country from one place to another, but always sort of hoping some day I'd see just the place I liked and settle down. Well, the minute I saw this place I fell in love with it, sort of. I figured I'd like to own it some day.

"That's where throwing that quarter came in. An old English carpenter I worked with once told me there was an old saying that if you saw a house you liked and could throw a coin clean over the ridge-pole and down on the other side without hitting, some day you'd own that house.

"Well, I did it with this house. I don't know whether it's for sale or not, or who owns it, but some day I want to buy it."

There was a sudden mistiness in the girl's eyes. She smiled defiantly, however.

"Well, some day when you have another quarter, come around and we'll talk business."

"Do you mean you own the house yourself?"

"Yes. I'm Miss Sturdevant. My father left it to me, and you see I love it too."

He got to his feet in confusion, sud-

denly realizing he was on delicate ground.

"I'm sorry I disturbed you. I'll be going. You didn't happen to see where that quarter fell, did you? It's a sort of lucky piece I've carried for a year now, and I'd hate to lose it."

The girl removed her gloved hand from behind her back. The tight little fist opened slowly with seeming reluctance, disclosing the silver disk. A moment she gazed at it as if fascinated, then extended it toward him. Suddenly she laughed a little hysterically. As he reached for the coin, she closed her hand over it again.

"As a matter of fact, which do you want most, the house or the quarter?" she asked.

"Quarter, or quarters?" he laughed, taking it as a jest. "You see, though, I can have the quarter and can use it if I have to. I can't have the house at present, anyhow, and I couldn't use it probably if I had it."

Again she gave her hysterical little laugh.

"Isn't it funny? I want the house too, more than anything else in the world, and—I can't keep it. You could have the house easily enough. You could have it for this quarter, as a matter of fact."

Suddenly she broke off with something that sounded like a sob swallowed back. She thrust the quarter at him.

"What nonsense I'm talking! Here, take your quarter and go, please."

He took the quarter in a daze and obeyed. But just as he was disappearing around the corner of the house she called.

"Would you really like to buy my house?"

"I'm afraid you're trying to kid me," he replied amiably, turning back.

"The joke of it is, I'm not," she told him seriously. "I think, somehow, I'd like you to have it, as long as I can't. Somebody's going to get it. They probably won't even pay me a quarter for it."

She paused a moment and swallowed hard. Her face had paled even to her lips. She looked too deadly serious for him to believe this was a joke.

"You can have it for a quarter," she told him.

Larry came slowly, thoughtfully back, more in doubt than ever now as to the girl's sanity. Again he squatted on his heels and chewed a grass end reflectively. When he spoke at last, it was with a hint of tender solicitude.

"Well, if you're really anxious to sell, and you'd be willing to give me a little time to raise something to pay down and the rest on easy terms, there is no harm in talking it over a little. I hope I'll be earning good wages in a day or two. I suppose that's what you meant when you said I could have it for a quarter."

"No, I didn't. I meant just what I said. I'll sell you the house outright for the lump sum of twenty-five cents."

THIS was too much. The girl would be imagining she was the Queen of Sheba and giving castles away next. He scrambled hastily to his feet, mumbling something about calling some other time and talking it over, and started off again. But there was a sound of quick light feet behind him. The girl caught him by the sleeve and swung him around.

"Wait," she commanded. "You don't understand. I want you to have my house. I think you'd be good

to it. You somehow remind me of my father. If you should see the fat, greasy person who's going to come tomorrow and take it away from me, you'd understand. I literally don't own even twenty-five cents' worth of equity in this house. You see, my father was once pretty well off. He built this house when he was a young man and this was the fashionable center of town. Then his health failed him, some time before he died, and he lost most of his money. When he died, a year ago, he had nothing left but this house, and he had mortgaged it heavily when it was still in good condition and before property values had dropped here.

"Now it isn't worth much more than the amount of the mortgage, and the back taxes will more than eat up the difference. So the mortgage-holder is going to take it over before he loses any more on it."

"I see," Larry commented. "Then if I take it over, I'll have to arrange to pay the taxes and the interest due on the mortgage and something on the mortgage too."

"Yes. Of course that's foolish, unless you really have some money somewhere. It wouldn't be a good bargain for you, not even at a quarter."

After several minutes of silence Larry jumped to his feet. "Maybe it's foolish, but I want this house. It's now or never. Young lady, you've made a sale!"

He thrust the quarter back into her hands.

"Come on. We'll see your lawyer; and maybe he won't drop dead when we tell him about it! If he does, we'll try another."

"But I can't go in this rig," she protested.

"Change quickly, then, before you

change your mind. Oh, I left my suitcase out in the street. Mind if I leave it here till we're through?"

He held his breath at the vision he saw in the doorway when the girl reappeared a few minutes later. He was not one to know that the lovely costume dated five years back in point of tailoring. The once correct street suit was crisp and spotless, though a feminine eye would have detected the signs of much wearing. It betrayed a graceful, well-molded little figure. A piquant turban pressed down ripples of chestnut hair and gave him his first view of an oval face.

On the instant the vision of his lost and unloved bride, that had been haunting Larry Kane for a year, vanished from his mind. For the second time in his life the fascination of a woman suddenly seized and possessed Larry Kane's sensitive soul. But the next moment he resolutely shook off the daze of it, put it sternly away from him. He was not free. He was still struggling to deny this new feeling when he and Miss Sturdevant reached the office of James Forsythe, the Sturdevant family lawyer.

THE legal gentleman had grave misgivings which he stated at length. There was, to begin with, a substantial sum due for his services and other matters attending the transfer. That meant more expense.

Larry lightly brushed them aside.

"Way I figure it," he said, "this bozo who holds the mortgage won't foreclose if he sees a fighting chance of somebody taking hold who can pay it up some day. I figure if he forecloses now and tries to get his money out of it in its present shape, he'll be out of luck, because it won't bring enough on a forced sale to clean it up."

Miss Sturdevant had also been watching Larry's face closely.

Now she suddenly turned, walked across the room, and stood looking out the window.

A look of sympathy flashed over the lawyer's face. Larry turned to him on sudden impulse. "Could I see you alone for a moment?" he asked. "Look here," Larry went on when they were alone in an inner office. "I don't want to take her home away, in case there's any possibility of saving it for her."

"I'll admit frankly there isn't," the lawyer told him. "Your buying it this way, in case it can be arranged with the mortgagor, would simply be a way of saving her face by avoiding foreclosure proceedings against her. She comes of a proud family."

"See here," Larry exclaimed on another impulse; "I'd like to do this: take the place over and fix it up, and give her a purchase contract to buy it back at any time. She might marry a man with money, or come into money in some other way, and then she could keep her old home. And I'd be glad to have her stay there meantime, as caretaker."

The old lawyer beamed approval.

"My good fellow, your heart is right, but any such arrangement would have to be approached very tactfully. Miss Sturdevant is very proud, you know. The worst of it is, she will have to earn her own living from now on, and she's never had any experience at that. She's a game little thing, though, and once she is started she will be all right. Now I'll see this man Sybel who holds the mortgage, and see if I can fix it."

The pair waited for a half hour, during which time they began to get a little better acquainted.

"All right," the lawyer told them on his return. "Sybel will let the mortgage run for a year from date, provided you make monthly payments on the present and back interest, taxes and insurance, and do the repairs you speak of."

So it was settled. When it came to signing the preliminary papers, Larry set down the name of Laurence Rockwell, the first two names by which he had been christened. He had not used the name of Kane for a year now.

"You can set down my residence as Flowerville," he told the lawyer, "because I'm here to stay, and I have been moving around so much I haven't had any settled legal residence since I was a kid. My family was tubercular, and we moved to Arizona when I was a youngster and lived out in the desert. I haven't been away from there long myself, and I'm all alone in the world."

THAT was all his new associates in Flowerville knew of the past of Laurence Rockwell for many years. Even the lawyer, in closing up the deal, took it for granted that the purchaser of the Sturdevant property was unmarried.

"I suppose you will want me to move out at once," Louise Sturdevant said in a little choking voice after the papers were signed.

That gave Larry the opening he was looking for.

"Why, no," he told her; "I am in no hurry. In fact, it would be a very great accommodation to me if you'd stay on and keep your furniture there. If you moved out, I'd have to furnish the place and get a housekeeper and caretaker. I can't buy furniture at present, so I'd have to rent some. Now,

why couldn't I rent the furniture from you and give you the use of part of the house in payment, plus whatever weekly sum you thought was fair? Perhaps you know some elderly woman, who is a lady living alone, who would like to take a room, too, and pay for it by acting as sort of housekeeper. That would help me out wonderfully. All I'd want would be a room in one end of the house."

"I think that would be a splendid arrangement," the lawyer spoke up quickly. "In fact, something might come up within the year that would make it possible to buy back your home on easy terms."

"When Mr. Rockwell learned the conditions under which you were forced to sell he was very uneasy about it and has volunteered to arrange for you to buy it back in case you are ever able to do so. For that purpose I have drawn up a paper giving you an indefinite option on it."

That was too much for the homesick girl. She broke down and wept. When she had herself under control again she agreed to the arrangement gratefully.

"I told you, Mr. Rockwell, that I wanted you to have my house because you reminded me so much of my father. You are kind and generous just like him; too much for your own good, I'm afraid."

"Kind, nothing," Larry denied. "I'm just being kind to myself."

So it came about that in one eventful day, beginning with the toss of a coin, Larry Kane ended his wanderings, found a home and a housekeeper, and a secret love for a girl he saw no hope of ever claiming, and who seemed to have adopted him as a second father.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

"What Kept You?"

Gayly daring a Chinese War Lord, Jimmie Cordie and his soldier of fortune comrades find action aplenty

By W. WIRT

Author of "I'm Shootin' Vely Good," "Swords Are Out," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

IN THE CHINESE FOOTHILLS.

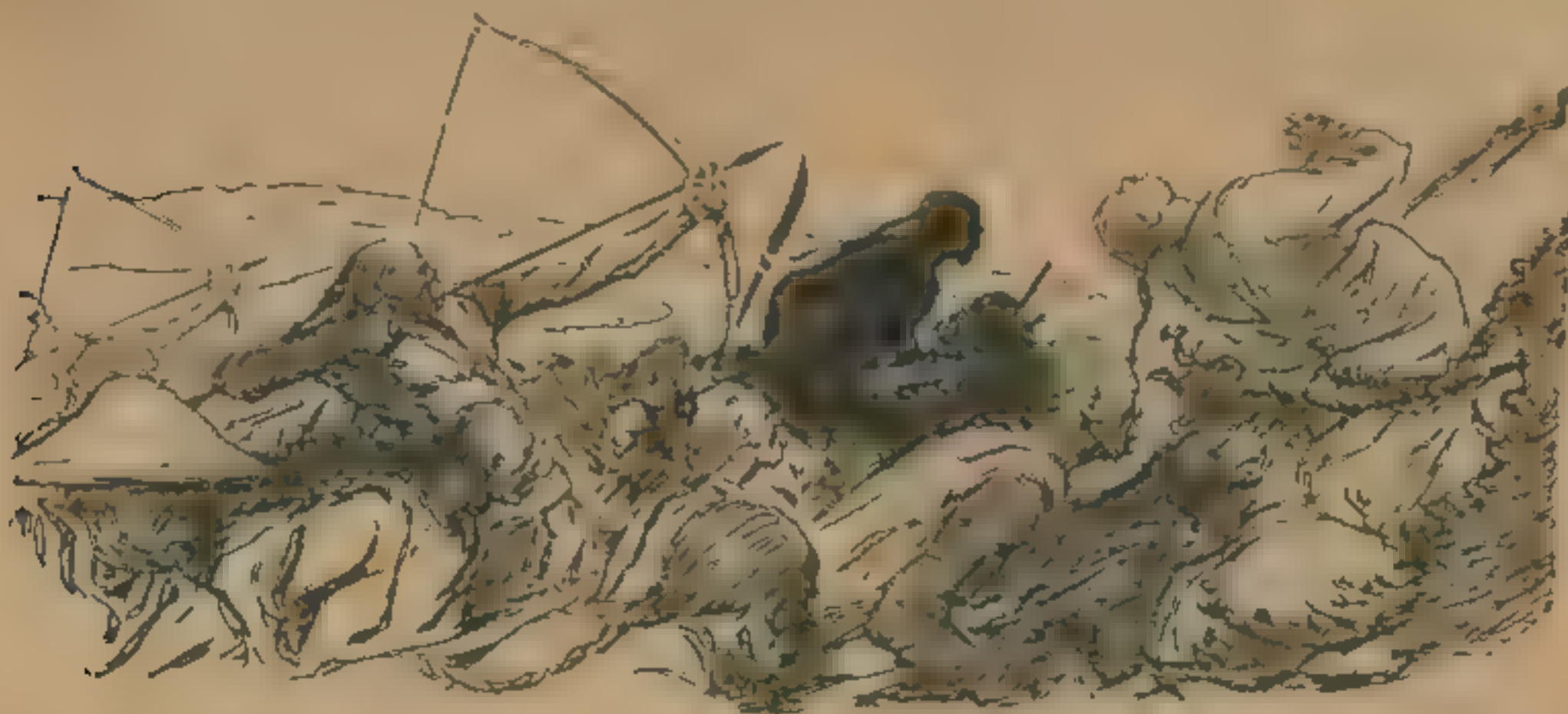
CUTHBERT PAGET ETHERINGTON, English mining engineer, lay dying on the narrow little path that ran zigzag down one of the foothills in the In-Shan mountains on the border of Shan-si, China.

A girl, not more than eighteen, blond, lovely, with slim, dainty little

ington said weakly, between moments when the blood did not seep through his lips. "Carry on. If you—see that you are—to be taken—" (a long pause here)—"Kill yourself with—" His head sank.

"Oh!" stammered the girl, one hand to her heart. "Don't! Uncle Bert! I—oh, please! Please! I'm—I'm afraid!"

The dying Englishman raised his



body and the pure white skin that goes with the perfection of English girlhood, was with him. She was as yet unwounded. On the path, a little back from where he lay, the bodies of two Chinese bearers were huddled together. Kneeling by the engineer, holding his head up, was another Chinese, hardly more than a boy.

"I'm going—West, Kathy," Ether-

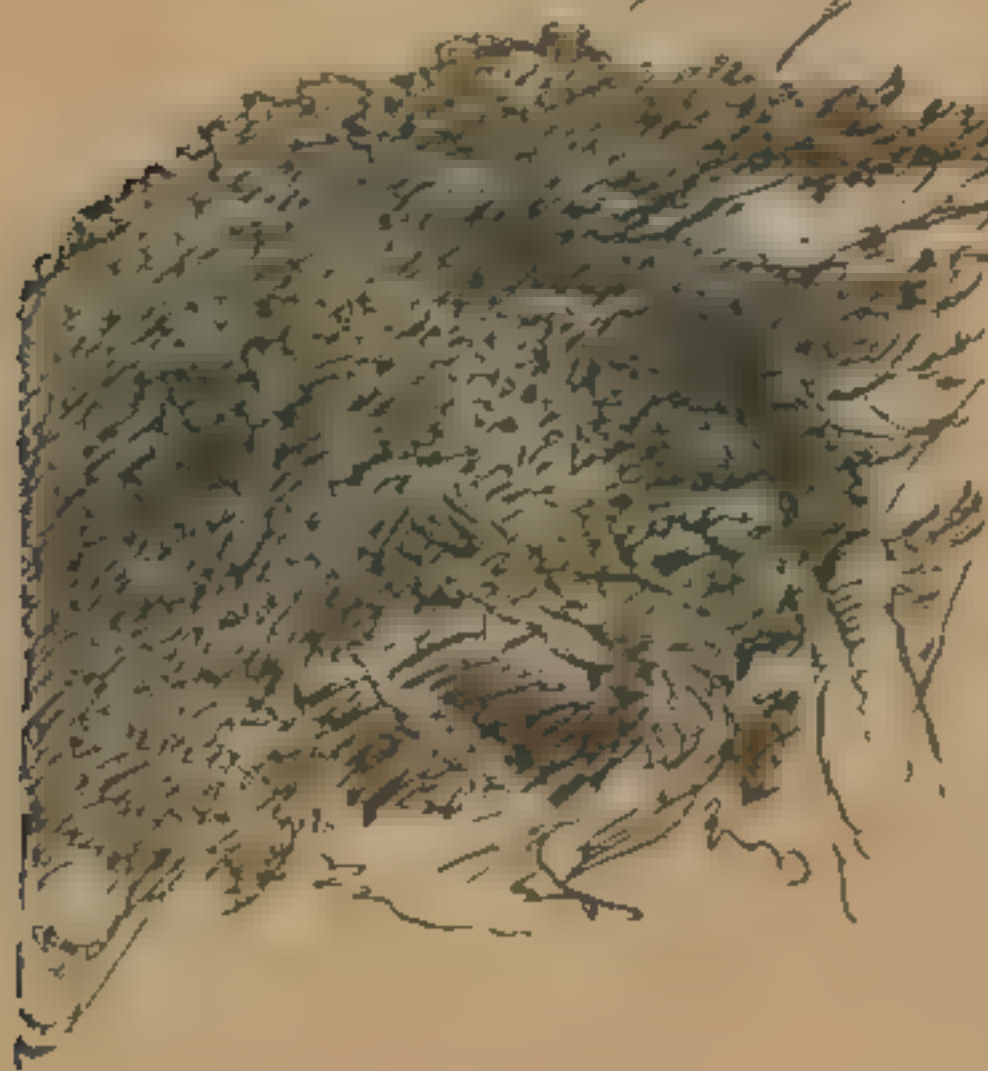
ington for a thousand years has been a coward. You will go with Li Tung here as far as you can." This time his head sank back, for the last time.

The Chinaman eased him down and

stood up. "May the Celestial Dragon, smoothly as a swan, cally youl honorable spilit on high," he said, then turned to the girl. "We must hully, missie. No can stay aloud—honorable uncle vely dead. Come click!"

"Oh! I—I can't leave him this way. We must—bury him, Li Tung." The tears came as she looked down on what had been her ever-gallant, courtly uncle, who had taken her and guarded her and cared for her ever since the death of her own father and mother twelve years before.

"Stay, and Chowyang catch," announced the boy, very firmly. "No can do." Lun like



helle, makee Kotan—plenty fliends Kotan."

The sound of rifle fire came from a path that crossed the one they were on a little above.

"Guns! Why, it may be some relief column," she cried, her tear-stained little face lighting up.

"Maybe-so—maybe-so not," and Li Tung tugged at her sleeve. "Hide!



The Bean and the Fighting Yid gave the bowmen their attention

Hide! Behind these locks — maybe-so Chinaman get guns! No can lun now, too close. Hide!"

KATHERINE NEVILLE allowed him to hurry her behind a rock alongside the path. As they crouched down, two men came along the path and at the crossing, turned down toward the bodies. They both were armed with 30-30 Winchesters and round their waists were belts full of .45 cartridges and from each belt swung a holstered Colt.

The pockets of their khaki uniforms bulged out with shells for the Winchesters. Outside of that they both carried packs and one man had four canteens hooked on various places.

One was tall, thin, with an aristocratic, solemn face, which disguised his gay, reckless, laughing spirit, and a general air of "you be damned."

The other was short, fat and roly-poly, with a good-natured face in which

the big blue eyes seemed to be popping out with surprise at what was going on. The eyes were misleading; the Fighting Yid, soldier of fortune, was never surprised at anything. His real name was Abraham Cohen, but he was the Fighting Yid to any one in the A. E. F., or in the Orient where since the war he had been cheerfully wildcatting, selling his uncanny skill with a rifle or machine gun to whatever War Lord was most in need of it. And if he couldn't sell it, he would go off on an expedition on his own or with any kindred spirit. It never made any difference to the Yid. 'All was fish that came to his net.

The tall man was the Boston Bean, real name was John Cabot Winthrop. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, of course. Millionaire several times over, with yachts, country houses, town apartments scattered all over the world; 'A. E. F., Foreign Legion, and like the Yid, a soldier of fortune. He left his yachts and other impedimenta in the hands of hired men while he "fussed around" wherever the fussing was good. To make the Bean perfectly happy, all that was needed at any time was a machine gun to fight, enough cigarettes to smoke, and the dirtier he was, the better, while the fighting lasted.

The two had come up in the hills with plenty of bearers, who had to be able to fight as well as bear, if they wanted to go with the Yid and the Bean. Their objective was an old shrine where they thought there would be some rare jades. But they had found between them and the said objective, a War Lord who didn't see any special reason for allowing two foreign devils an opportunity to look over shrines uninvited, at least in his neck of the woods.

They argued the point with him, the argument on their side being conducted with 30-30 rifles, and on his part with what old trade guns he had, swords, lances and what-not. What he had that turned the argument in his favor was a thousand or so men that he didn't mind having killed off. He threw them at the Yid and the Bean in a ceaseless stream. The Yid, the Bean and the bearers all did "noble," as the Bean said afterward, but before long there were no bearers left; and the Bean and the Yid began to execute one of those famous rearward movements commonly called a retreat.

The War Lord, after counting what noses he had left, decided he'd had about enough, himself, and was content with detailing a party to stick along and harry the retiring forces, which consisted of the two above-mentioned gentlemen. The War Lord cherished the pleasant hope that they would run out of ammunition.

The Bean and the Yid, however, weren't packing much else besides ammunition, and so couldn't oblige the War Lord. The pursuing swordsmen soon learned that to show themselves meant death for the careless one, or a wound in the part that showed, and they contented themselves with tagging along, as much out of sight as possible. Every once in awhile, one or two of them would get full of opium and would test their luck, which was always bad.

AS the Bean and the Yid saw the bodies, two Chinese came down the path, full speed ahead, their swords out and ready.

"Somebody has been handing that hop around again," said the Bean mournfully, as his 30-30 cuddled against his cheek.

"Here is a pill to go vid it," said the Yid with a smirk, as his rifle came up also. There were two whiplash cracks, and the two Chinamen pitched forward on their faces, their swords glimmering in the hot sun. The Bean and the Yid stood there, their rifles ready, but no more came around the bend of the path.

"I guess that's all this time," said the Bean finally as he lowered his rifle.

"Und two more makes—vat is de count, Beaneater?"

"I lost track. What do you care, you won't ever be able to publish it, and no one would believe you anyway."

They both laughed. The fact that they were on foot, in a territory teeming with men who would try to kill them on sight, and with at least three hundred miles separating them from any place where there was a semblance of law and order, didn't appear to worry them in the least; and as a matter of fact, it didn't.

"Go down and take a look-see," said the Bean. "I'll wait for a minute and see if any more are coming."

The Yid went down, his eyes seeming to pop out further as he stared down at Etherington.

"Oi! Beaneater!" he called. "Vite man! Englisher! Colder than a vag-on tire. Come on down und—vat de hell!"

The girl and the Chinese boy rose from behind the rock. The Bean promptly came down, ignoring the chance of any further attack.

"You—you are white men!" gasped Katherine. She swayed back, then forward.

"Steady," said the Bean, putting a long arm around her. "Steady goes it. You are all right—we are white men, Americans."

"On de fire!" yelled the Yid. "Com-in' up de hill. Kwick!"

He knelt, almost beside the body of Etherington, and his rifle began to spit a steel-jacketed death at the body of Chinese who were charging straight up the hill at them, not more than two hundred yards below. As the Bean released the girl, she stiffened as, never again to leave her, the blood of the fighting Nevilles came surging through her dainty body. Her proud little head went up and she drew the small automatic at her belt. As the Bean's rifle joined in, her little gun did also.

It was a silent charge and a deadly one, led by a young officer in a natty uniform. It was not a large party, some twenty odd men, but it started out and came up like a very efficient one. As the guns began to stop it, a small group of Chinese came around the bend. They were all that was left of the outfit that had been following the Bean and the Yid. They took one look at the men coming up the hill, recognized who they were, and promptly started for home. One look had told them they had been playing tag with the Bean and the Yid a little too long and it behooved them to get out of that territory as fast as possible if they wanted to live any longer. They all loved life better than their War Lord's revenge, so they left rapidly.

The efficient-looking fighters were climbing the hill under the fire of men who were just as efficient and dead shots also. Man after man went down, the young officer among the first; and when the charge reached within fifty yards, the survivors had got plenty. It was like running squarely into the face of death. They broke and ran, on both sides. As they reached the bottom of the hill, a much larger body came into sight.

"Oi," said the Yid, as he stood up, "dot vos only de advance guard. Here it comes de army."

The troops made no attempt to charge at once. They stood there, waiting the command of an officer who was mounted. This man sat on his horse, looking at the men who were now fleeing toward him.

"Two—four—maybe-so four-fifty yards," counted the Yid, raising the sight on his Winchester. "I got it ten smackers dot says I can knock him off de pony in von shot, ain't it, Beany?"

"Let him alone. He may withdraw the army. We better be hunting a place to hole up—and make it snappy, also. This is no place for us. Come on."

"Vare—oi, I see it. Could ve get up dare mitoudt vings, ve stands off de army, no foolin'."

"It's up to us to grow some feathers then," answered the Bean grimly. "Come on, talk about it later." He led the way up what looked like a crevice along the side of a towering rock. From where they stood, the top looked level for a space about as big as a billiard table.

"Vait," said the Yid. "I get it these canteens—our vater is almost nix." He stooped and unhooked the two canteens that were on Etherington and snapped them on his own belt. As they started up the crevice, the Bean helping Katherine, the officer on the horse far below shouted an order and one company trotted briskly forward.

"Dey is coming," announced the Yid, who had looked back for a moment. "Make it snappy, Beaneater."

THEY made the top, about one hundred feet, as the company reached the bottom of the little slope that led to the rock. It was just about what it looked like from below: a flat top,

about ten by six feet. No vegetation, no water, no dirt, nothing but bare rock. The whole rock was like an immense silo with a flat top. There was no way up it except by the crevice, and that was so narrow that two persons at a time, even if thin, would have a hard time making it.

"My, vat a fine place," said the Yid, as they reached it. "De only vay dot dey gets us, is by bombin' vid planes. Already dey is going back to tell popper about it."

"They'll try us out," answered the Bean, "and then do that siege thing. But at that, we couldn't take all the fight they'd bring us in the open. Are you all right, Miss—?"

"My name is Katherine Neville," she answered. "I am so glad that you came. That was my uncle." The tears came in the hyacinth blue eyes and the exquisite lips quivered a little in spite of her efforts.

"Tell us about it later," said the Bean hastily. "You are quite all right now, Miss Neville," and he smiled at her. Few people could resist the homely Bean-eater's smile, and the girl, after looking at him for a moment, smiled bravely back.

"Popper has sent dem back to bring us to him," announced the Yid, who was lying face down, looking over the edge.

"Yeah?" answered the Bean. "We haven't much time then. Here, you, what is your name?" to the Chinese boy.

"Li Tung," he answered promptly. "Top-side boy for Captain Ethelington."

"Fair enough," said the Bean gravely. "His spirit is now watching you from on high to see how much top-side boy you are. This, his spirit tells me to order that you do. Go down the

rock and run, hide, run, hide until you reach Chi-kow on the Gulf of Chih-li. You know Chi-kow?"

Katherine spoke: "It is where we started from, sir."

"I know," answered Li Tung, "plenty good. I lun, I hide, I lun—what do aftel gettee Chi-kow?"

"You will find there four white men. Ask for a man named Jimmie Cordie—say that name."

"Jimmie Coldie," repeated Li Tung, with a smile. He was clever, this young Chinese boy, and Etherington had taught him much in the four years Li Tung had been with him.

"Right," went on the Bean. "With him will be Red Dolan—say that."

"Led Dolan," Li Tung answered.

"With them will be Grigsby and Putney—say those names."

"Gligsby and Plutney."

"If any of them are there, give them this message. Come here, Yid. Never mind the neighbors' children for a minute—they can't get here for a little while. I want to frame a message for Jimmie."

JUST as the first of the advancing men reached the slope, the boy wiggled down and out of the crevice into the brush like a snake. As he started, the Bean said, "Remember, Li Tung—the spirit of Captain Etherington gives you five days to make it."

If the boy was seen, which is doubtful, there was no attempt at pursuit. It may have been that they thought that one Chinaman wasn't worth chasing in the face of better game.

The Yid and the Bean let the men of the company get up to the crevice and then, with only their rifles and forehead and eyes showing over the edge, killed the first two men that started up.

Several guns were promptly discharged at them, but as is mostly the case in that part of China, or in any part away from the coast, the arms carried were mostly swords and lances with quite a few bows and arrows. The gunfire did not even come close and after one or two arrows had come nearer than was pleasant, the Yid and the Bean gave the bowmen their exclusive attention for a few minutes, with the result that when they turned again to the crevice, there were no more arrows to trouble them. The Chinese tried the crevice, two by two, then in a continual stream, but none lived to get halfway. It was suicide, that was all, and very soon the Chinese recognized it as such and quit trying. Those that were left went back to the main body. The three on top of the rock watched them until they merged with the rest, then in a little while, saw a circle, well out of accurate firing range, form around the rock.

"Vell," said the Yid with a grin, "from vat I see, it looks like ve stay avile, ain't it, Beany?"

"At least long enough for us to introduce ourselves to Miss Neville," gravely answered the Bean. "The gentleman on your left who has just spoken, Miss Neville, is Mr. Abraham Cohen, late of New York City in the vicinity of Hester Street, then the A. E. F. and points east and west. I am John Winthrop from Boston—"

"Vich is de home of de codfish und de bean, Miss Neville," interrupted the Yid. "Und dot is vy ve call it Bean-eater, or Codfish, or Beany."

"Mr. Cohen will answer much more readily to the name Yid," the Bean solemnly added, "and I will recommend him highly as a simon-pure specimen of a fighting Yid—and what could be fightinger than a fighting Yid?"

"I esk you?" grinned the Yid.

Katherine sensed that they were talking to keep her spirits up, and she smiled at both of them. With the unerring intuition of a woman, she knew that she had found two men who were as big brothers to her and who would both die before any harm could reach her.

"How long do you think it will be before the men you sent for can get here, Mr. Winthrop?"

"That question is a hard one to answer. Given that Li Tung makes it, and our friends are still there—I would say roughly ten, twelve days, Miss Neville."

"Twelve days! Must we stay up here on this rock for twelve days? Why, what will we eat and drink and everything? Why, how can we last that long?"

"Well," answered the Bean, just as gravely, although there was a twinkle in his eye, "any one that gets tired of staying up here can go down at any time. Personally, after looking at the reception committee, I am going to stay here. And that starts us off. Yid, open up the packs and see how much we have left of the old iron rations. There's four, no, six canteens of water. Miss Neville, you will have to go on an allowance, I'm afraid."

"I am—my father was Colonel Neville, Mr. Winthrop, and after his death I was with my uncle, Captain Etherington, all over the world. I can go on short rations. Oh, Uncle Bertie—I—I am a soldier's daughter and I am not going to cry—at least not while we are on the fi—firing line," she announced sternly.

"Oi, vat a business," said the Yid, from where he was parcelling out the cans and packages. "Und vy not cry? Go ahead und cry all you vant. Me

und de Bean cry, lots of times, don't ve, Beaneater? Cry, und den you feel it better, ain't it? Maybe-so dot your Uncle Bertie from vare he is sittin' on high, he see you cry und den he feel better, knowin' dot de cry vill make it better for you, likewise. Go ahead und cry, like a nice girl," the Yid encouraged.

"Why, I—I know you will take care of me and—" The tears came and she turned away, burying her proud little head in her arms.

THE sobs gradually died away and she raised her head. Her eyes opened wide as she saw the little tent the Yid and the Bean had made right in the middle of the top. It wasn't much of a tent, being made by the two rifles as poles, the packs as weights and two blankets and two clean white suits, some clean B. V. D.'s, and anything else usable that had been in the two packs. It looked like a pile of fallen family washing, but it gave some privacy at least.

"Your apartment," said the Bean, with a flourish of his hand. "You will note that it is in the middle of the building. The one I will occupy is on one side of you, Mr. Cohen's will be on the other side. So in case you do any sleep-walking, you will not fall off the roof. In case the apartment suddenly falls in on you, it will be because we are reaching for the poles in a hurry."

She saw what they had done for her and now, feeling better after her cry, she really smiled. "Why, thank you, Mr. Winthrop and Mr. Cohen. It is a very nice apartment, indeed."

"I really wish," said the Bean, "that you could find it possible to drop that Mr. Winthrop thing and I am quite sure that Mr. Cohen feels the

same. Frankly, if you could use the names that we are more used to hearing, it would make us feel much more at home."

"My goodness, yes," assured the Yid. "I haven't heard dot Mr. Cohen for so long; und dare is so many Cohens, ain't it?"

"But only one Fighting Yid," said Katherine, with a smile. "Of course I will—Beaneater, and Yid."

"Dot's de girl," answered the Yid. "Und now, listen to popper. Dare is, mit care, enough to eat for eight days; mit extra care, ten; und on a starvation ration—two weeks. Vich do ve go on?"

"I think," announced the Bean, "that we better take the extra care one. Which do you suggest, Miss Neville?"

"Katherine, please," answered Miss Neville. "I think the extra care one, also."

"Suits me," agreed the Yid. "Und now the vater? Dare is four full canteens und"—he reached for the two he had taken from Etherington—"von is full, und dis von"—he shook it—"not so good. Maybe-so a little."

"Half a cupful morning and night, then," said the Bean. "All set?"

"All set," answered Katherine.

"Jake mit me," grinned the Yid. "I take it de first vatch," and eased over to the edge.

ready to return to Hongkong. A T'ai-p'ing war junk was in the harbor, awaiting their pleasure. Feng-cheng, who had graduated from Boston Tech in the same class as Jimmie Cordie, one of the four, had persuaded them to stay over a couple of days with him. If he hadn't, they would have missed the worn and ragged Chinese boy who now stood in front of them.

They were all big men: Red Dolan, the biggest, was two hundred and thirty pounds of living steel, surmounted by a flaming red topknot of hair. Jimmie Cordie was the slightest of the four, with black eyes, a thin face, a smile almost always on his lips and in his eyes. George Grigsby, a dark chap from the Kentucky hills, had a hawk-like nose, tight lips, and a body as lithe and quick as a panther. Arthur Putney, from Vermont, was as tall and broad as Grigsby, silent, slow to speak and fast to move, with the steady eyes of his New England ancestors. All of them had served in the Foreign Legion, the A. E. F., and after the war had been together continually, in the places where the only law was how far you could make men obey your orders. Any one of the four would have cheerfully died for the rest, and all of them could make a machine gun hold on a mark as closely as a rifle. Of the four, Jimmie Cordie was the best shot, if a best could be picked out. Big Red Dolan loved Jimmie Cordie better than he did his patron saint.

The Bean had known the four were going on a mission for the T'ai-p'ing. He had invited himself to go along, as he did on every possible occasion; and having been refused with friendly jeers, he had gone with the Yid, who had a little private enterprise, as stated. The Bean and the Yid had not been needed on the T'ai-p'ing affair.

CHAPTER II.

HUNGRY FOR TROUBLE.

THE four big, lean, bronzed Americans sat in the scented gardens of Feng-cheng in Chi-kow. They had been on a mission for Yen Yuan, head of the dreaded T'ai-p'ing secret society, a mission that only white men could accomplish, and now they were

"Ye have a message from the Boston Bean and the Fighting Yid?" Red demanded of the Chinese youth. "And what do they mean by sendin' a message by the likes of ye?"

The boy, Li Tung, met the cold gleam in the frosty blue eyes with a smile. A look of intense concentration came on his face and he drew a long breath; then, as if beginning a lesson taught him—he was, for that matter—he began, in a singsong voice:

"Boston Bean an' Fightin' Lid say, come vely click to big lock—Shang-si—lescue them from bad men—allee same lesue—"

"What?" shouted Red. "We are to go to Shang-si and rescue those apes? Why the hell don't they stay at home, the monkey-faced gibbons?"

"Put a jaw tackle on that flannel mouth of yours for a minute," said Jimmie Cordie. "Listen, little brother: If the men you call the Boston Bean and the Fighting Yid did not send you—or if they have been in any way compelled to send this message—or if they are not in trouble—then it will be much better for you that you turn and walk away, now."

"It will," added Red, "whilst ye are still all in wan piece."

"It is true," said the boy. "My mis'ble head will pay if not so."

"It will," answered Red with the deepest conviction, "wid or widout your permission, me bucko."

"Shut up, Red," Cordie said, his eyes on the Chinese boy. "Go ahead with the message, little brother."

Li Tung drew another breath, and the effort came back into his voice as he started to chant, all in one breath:

"Boston Bean tell me, sing to Jimmie Coldie: 'Beans an' blown bleed Slat'day night, an' fish balls Slunday molning'—an' Fightin' Lid say tell

Led Dolan, 'Big Ilish bum come an' get Liddish beatin' up.'"

He finished gasping for breath, but with a smile of triumph, well pleased with himself—and he had a right to be, at that.

"'Tis them," announced Red firmly, "and when I get the two hands of me on that Yid ape, I will—"

"Tell *him* about it," drawled Grigsby. "Let's get at it."

"BETTER let me handle things," said Jimmie Cordie, rising. As he did, he said: "You have done well, O honorable little brother. This," he took a handful of money out of a pocket and handed it to Li Tung, "is not pay for what you have done—but a present from one man to another."

Li Tung bowed and took the money, his eyes shining. There was enough there to give him ease and luxury for a long time; and even more he appreciated the honor paid him.

"Come with me, and eat and drink," Jimmie went on. "I'll be back as soon as I get the dope," he said to the rest as he started with the boy.

In about half an hour, he came back, Li Tung with him. Their host had acted as interpreter.

"Here it is," Jimmie said, "as close as I can get it, with Feng-cheng's help." He told of the meeting of Katherine Neville with the Yid and the Bean and where they had holed up. "That was five days ago. Now it seems that this Captain Etherington was looking at some mines in Shan-si for an English syndicate. The top cutter of the town agreed to furnish protection for Etherington's party, which included his niece and a couple of young engineers; and he did that little thing until another War Lord by the name of Chow-yang came along and started a fight. Ether-

ington's outfit got off to a flying start, but it seems that before the scrapping started, the new War Lord had caught a good look-see at Miss Neville and wanted to add her to his collection. He sent a party out after them as soon as he mopped up on the city, evidently. They caught up and in the running fight that followed, the two young engineers and all but one of the bearers, this young gent, Li Tung, got killed. Just as the Yid and the Bean appear on the scene from the good Lord knows where, Etherington goes West. The Yid and the Bean stand off the pursuit, and make it to the top of a big rock which they were going to hold against all comers. They send the kid here out with an S. O. S. to us. Now that you know all about it, let's go."

"Wait a minute, Jecms," said Putney. "Go how. Do you think that all we got to do is to start and walk through Shang-si? If you do, young feller, me lad, take two more thinks. Did it ever occur to you that in the province of Shang-si there are some fifty million gents, any one of whom would cheerfully give us the hot egg treatment?"

"If ye are afraid to go, ye lily-livered old lady," announced Red, with deep disgust, "me and Jimmie will go by ourselves."

"I'll go anywhere you will go, you red-headed ape from the north of Ireland," grinned Putney, "only I'd like to take a look-see first."

"And well I know ye would, ye black-muzzled scut," conceded Red. "Do ye mean to tell me that we can't take a couple of machine guns and slap all the Chinks between here and them lads outta the way?"

"Why take any?" answered Putney. "Take a sword, Red."

"Listen, kidders," Jimmie Cordie

3 A

broke in, "while we are sitting here, the Yid and the Bean and Miss Neville may be starving to death."

"Not the Yid," asserted Red, "he's got too much fat."

"All kidding to one side, Jimmie," Grigsby interrupted, "have you got any idea how to go in—outside of doing as Red says?"

"Yeah, boy. Feng-cheng tells me that there is an English flyer in Pei-ho that has been working for some darn War Lord or what not. He says that this bird has an old army bomber of some kind, big enough to hold five or six. He's off now to see if the said flyer is open to do a little high and lively flying on the side."

"Yeah? If he is, then what?"

"Why, we'll take my little brother here, Li Tung, load 'er up with all the ammunition she can carry, plus a couple of Brownings, plus ourselves, and then fly to the rock. Simple, isn't it?"

"Darn simple," said Putney, with a grin. "Only, Jecms me lad, continue from there. We fly to the rock—then what?"

"My gosh, have I got to take you by the hand all the way? We land and—"

"But 'do we? Is there a landing place up there? Given that we do, how can we pack three more people back? Also—"

"Ask the flyer," grinned Jimmie. "Let's get to the rock, first."

FENG-CHENG came back from Pei-ho late that afternoon and brought with him a lean, tanned young Englishman, who, after one keen look at the four men who arose to meet him, smiled cheerfully and became one of the outfit. After they told him what they wanted, he still smiled. "Well,

if we can land, and if your people are still there, we can make room for them by unloading most of the ammunition. I've carried eight in the old bus before now. She's a stanch old thing. I say, we can mount the blooming machine guns on the scarf yoke and turn her into a battle wagon, what?"

Red had been looking the young English flyer over and, having decided that he was "there," produced his cigarettes and handed them over. "'Tis a good idea. Wid the likes of ye at the stick and me and Jimmie at the gats, we can go from here to hell and back." Which was admitting John Cecil Mowbray to the fellowship.

They had Brownings and ammunition with them, having brought them up from Hong Kong to use in their little affair; but it had been compromised after a pitifully easy fight.

The young flyer brought the plane down, and all the useful load, besides their own weight, food, water, gas, and oil, they made up in ammunition and guns. The flyer took off easily, went a little way out in the Gulf of Chih-li, so as to satisfy the curious that they were bound for Port Arthur, then turned and headed for the border of Shan-si.

Red was sitting by Jimmie Cordie and leaned over to shout in Jimmie's ear, "Hey, Jimmie, this beats walkin', don't it?"

"It do—except that if anything goes wrong you can't get out and fix it, old kid."

"Who would want to get out, ye scut? Step over the side, count three and pull the cord and—"

"And land smack in some War Lord's back yard. This is the province where they are always glad to see foreign devils—to give 'em the slicing treatment."

"Not me," said Red firmly. "Do

I land, I have me Colt in me fist, first, last, and all the time."

They flew steadily and nothing went wrong. Hour after hour, due east. From Pei-ho to the rock was roughly some four hundred miles.

"At ninety miles an hour," said Jimmie, "we ought to be picking the rock up any minute."

Li Tung heard him and answered, "Velly soon now, honolable eldel blothel."

CHAPTER III.

BRAVE DEFENSE.

THE first night on the top of the rock had been one that allowed neither the Yid, the Bean or Katherine any sleep. As soon as it got dark, there began a slow, steady dribble of Chinese, sometimes one, sometimes two, up the slope and then up the crevice. But always to meet them was the beam of the Bean's flashlight, and the *Pow!* of the Yid's .45 Colt.

In the morning a party had advanced under a flag of truce and halted at the start of the crevice. The Yid stuck his head over the edge and conducted the negotiations for the besieged.

The Chinese officer sat on his horse, an interpreter stood beside him. The officer looked up at the smirking Yid, then down at the interpreter, and snarled a sentence. The interpreter looked up and shouted:

"The Lord Chow-yang, who is War Lord of all Shang-si, demands your surrender." This interpreter must have been educated in England, as he did not slip on the "r" that is fatal to most Chinese.

"Gif de Var Lord de compliments of de Boston Bean und de Yid, und

tell him dot he could go to hell vid all Shang-si vid him. Tell him likewise dot ve double-dare *him* to come up de crack. Ve are some Var Lords ourselves, ain't it?"

The interpreter translated this to the best of his ability, and the officer dictated another order.

"The lieutenant of Chow-yang, who is here before you, says that you are very foolish. You cannot escape. The Lord Chow-yang wishes the maiden that you have with you. If you will give her to him, he will send you to the coast with an escort and much gold. If you do not, he will send his men against you until you are out of ammunition and then, when he takes you, you will both receive Ling'ith or will be boiled alive in oil. The lieutenant of Chow-yang says for you to choose."

"Tell de Var Lord dot first he must catch de rabbit before it starts dot boiling in de pot. Ve is comfortable up here und don't vant to meet no Var Lords. Besides, de Lenox Avenue Tigers und de Navy und de Marines dot always land first is coming up de creek to rescue us as soon as dey gets through lunch. Here ve are un here ve stay. If de Var Lord don't like it dot ve liff on top of de rock, tell him to come and put us out. Go back und tell him dot de Boston Bean und de Yid say he is a piece of cheese—"

"Katherine Neville also," came a clear voice from behind the Yid.

The Fighting Yid grinned and added, "Und also Miss Katherine Neville say dot de cheese is limberger."

The officer, on getting the translation, snarled a short sentence, whirled his horse, then pulled up and spat out a few words more. The interpreter called, "The War Lord Chow-yang will come. The request is made that

the wounded and dead may be removed."

"Go ahead," answered the Yid, agreeably. "Take 'em away if you vant 'em. Ve don't."

The officer and his escort trotted back, and a little later a burial party came out.

Twice that day the Chinese tried massed attacks, but no man lived to get even close to the crevice. The Yid and the Bean began shooting long before the bowmen could get within arrow range and what few guns the Chinese had were negligible factors. To reach the rock under fire of two marksmen would be hard enough for any outfit without heavy loss and to climb up a narrow crevice one by one and live to get to the top was impossible as long as the defenders could pull trigger—and these two men most certainly could do that thing.

No more came that day, but at night the dribble commenced once more. The Yid and the Bean didn't mind; the nights were fairly warm and now the moon was out, making the flashlight unnecessary. They spelled each other or stood the watch together.

If any two men in the world had to be on top of a rock in Eastern China and the hardest to "draw" had to be chosen, there is no question but what the Yid and the Bean would be among those seriously considered. Both of them looked upon life as a huge joke; both fatalistically believed that when their number was up they would pass out, and not before. Both were expert marksmen and neither of them feared any living thing—or things.

And Katherine Neville slept soundly at night in "her apartment," undisturbed by the occasional *crack* of a Colt .45. During the day she would keep watch and the Yid and the Bean

would sleep. Just where the crevice reached the top she had found a little opening in the rock that made a small cave, and when the men were awake, she would go there to get out of the sun, which didn't seem to affect the Yid and the Bean at all.

ALL in all, as the Yid announced as they sucked on some beef cubes, the fifth morning, "Ve got it all de comforts of a home, ain't it?"

"We'll have to break the lease, though," answered the Bean, as he poured out the water allowance. "The water is running low. I'll speak to the janitor about the low pressure. If Li Tung made it to Chi-kow, he is there by now. Give Jimmie and the rest six days to make it there—ladies and gentlemen, I regret to announce that from now on, the water will be doled out by the spoonful."

"Oi, Beaneater," protested the Yid, "dare is enough und—"

"Enough to last us seven days, yes. But, my distinguished friend from Jerusalem, if James doesn't come—what then?"

"Easy. Ve gif him until de seventh day und by den if dey are not here, ve sneak down de crack in de moonlight und starts out to meet 'em."

The Bean, from where he sat, looked at the far-away circle of Chinese, thought of the four hundred miles between them and anything that even faintly resembled safety for a woman—and grinned. "Fair enough."

"Und right over dare is plenty of vater," continued the Yid. "Vat ve do is dis, ain't it? Right now, ve all take von good drink und den go back to de ration stuff for seven days."

"Suits me," answered the Bean. "How about you, Katherine?"

"Well," she confessed, "I really

would like a real drink, you know. I'm awfully thirsty."

"Dot settles it," said the Yid, getting up, "I'll get it."

He went over to where the canteens lay in the shade of the "apartment" and came back with a full one. Katherine looked at it. "Why, that's one of Uncle Bertie's. There was very good water where we camped."

"We'll sample it," the Yid said, as he reached for a cup.

Both the Bean and Katherine held their cups out and the Yid filled all three.

"Happy days," he said, as he lifted his to his lips. They laughed and all three drained the cups of water. As the Bean put his down he made a wry face. "I don't think much of that good water of your Uncle Bert—." He pitched forward on his face, his body over Katherine Neville's feet.

The Yid's eyes almost popped out as he got to his feet. "Dot vater! Drugged! Kwick—get—." He swayed and fell across the Bean. As he got up, Katherine Neville had worked her feet loose and tried to rise also. She couldn't make it before the powerful drug got her. As if in a mist, she saw the Yid come forward, then she felt herself sinking in the darkness that had come. She went down, her proud little head finding a resting-place on the Bean's shoulder.

KATHERINE NEVILLE awoke to find the darkness gone. As she did, she was conscious of a bad zinc-like taste in her mouth, and her head ached badly. She groped with one little hand to touch some familiar thing—then sat up. She was in a room, hung with heavy satin curtains for walls, the front of which was open to a little ornate balcony. From where

she sat, in the silken bed, she could see out over the roofs of houses and temples. Her clothes had been taken from her and in their place she wore a sheer silk robe.

Beside the bed sat an old Chinese woman. A little further away were seated two young Chinese girls. Katherine Neville did not have to be told where she was. She knew in the first glance that she had been captured by some Chinese War Lord.

Her lovely face went white and her lips trembled for a moment, then her head went up and her lips became tight. She remembered what her uncle had said, "You are a Neville. Live—and die like one." There must be some way that she could kill herself; and whatever that way was, she would take it.

The old woman spoke to her in Chinese. Katherine shook her head; she did not understand Chinese, save for a few words. The woman said something to one of the girls who bowed and left the room. The other girl rose and came to the bed with a little porcelain jar of water. Katherine took it and drank, rinsing her mouth as best she could. As she handed back the jar, the girl who had gone out came back with a man. It was the interpreter who had been at the rock.

He bowed low, then straightened up and stood near the bed. Katherine reached down and pulled one of the silk covers up over her shoulders as far as she could. The little silk robe exposed her white flesh more than it hid it.

The Chinaman had not looked at her. He knew that was for Chow-yang.

"I regret to have to disturb you, Miss Neville," he said blandly, "but orders have been given that I was to see you at once, on your return."

The thought that she must get a sword or a knife beat against her brain and with it came strength to play a part.

"I am very glad to see some one," and she smiled. The Neville blood was in action now. "Outside of those two white beasts that held me prisoner."

In spite of his training the man's eyes widened a little. "You mean the two men that met you as your uncle passed on high?"

"Yes. They made me go to the top of the rock with them."

"You went with them unwillingly?"

"What else could I do? Just as I went with my uncle—unwillingly."

"I am afraid that my poor brain cannot grasp it, Miss Neville. You went with your uncle against your wishes?"

"Very much so," she answered with a smile. "I did not wish to leave the city. I am tired of ceaseless traveling and would rest—with the Lord Chow-yang, whom I saw before my uncle fled."

The young Chinese interpreter, who had spent several years in England and America, smiled. "Your words are as fair and scented as a flower," he said, "and they will warm the heart of the Lord Chow-yang." He knew she was lying. He had had enough contact with English and American women to know how they felt about the yellow race. That this English girl would willingly come to the arms of a Chinese was preposterous, but, like all Chinese, he admired bravery.

"In that case," he went on smoothly, "you will receive the administrations of the slaves here, in preparing you for the happiness that awaits you. The Lord Chow-yang had ordered that you be made ready—for him."

Katherine felt suddenly cold, all

over. There was something more deadly than force in the bland, polite tones. She wondered, even as she answered, whether or not she could leap from the bed and draw the short sword from his sash, before she was stopped. "Why, of course I will be glad to be prepared for the Lord Chow-yang." As she said it, the Chinaman must have read in her eyes what she wanted to do, because he smiled and stepped back two steps.

"The men that held me on the rock? Are they dead?" she went on.

"No, they are not dead. Yet. The Lord Chow-yang has them in a safe place," and he smiled once more. "You may discuss with him their disposal."

"Tell the Lord Chow-yang that I await him."

The Chinaman was by now frankly puzzled. That any Anglo-Saxon girl would take things so calmly, he could not understand. He knew she lied about the compulsion, and knew that she must have some plan; but he thought it concerned escape. That she could talk calmly, awaiting her chance to kill herself, hoping to disarm watchfulness by doing it, never occurred to him.

"I will tell the Lord Chow-yang," he said, then bowed and left the room. Katherine let the silk cover fall and got out of the bed. She stood straight, as straight as if at attention, her shoulders back and her head up. "I am ready."

The old woman sensed rather than understood her, and rose. Seated on a three-legged stool, she was offered tea and sweetmeats and little chopped pieces of meat in rice. All the time the hand-maidens were scenting and massaging her lovely body, Katherine had tried to see something with which she could kill herself—a long hairpin, any-

thing; but she had failed. The Lord Chow-yang's "mother of the maidens" had prepared maidens, unwilling maidens, before, and knew how little a thing, properly used, was needed to cause death.

That the Yid and the Bean were still alive Katherine knew. That they would in some way be used by Chow-yang to compel her surrender to him, she also knew. No Chinese wants to take a woman by force—he wants the woman to yield to him, by what means matters not.

Finally the summons came, "The Lord Chow-yang is ready to receive the Lady Neville."

Katherine rose and with a body-guard that seemed to her to have materialized out of thin air, she walked proudly out on the balcony and along it to a door that was held open by low-bowing slaves.

Chow-yang rose as she entered the room. He was young, not more than twenty-six or seven; an educated Chinese, a fighter who had won his way to an overlordship in the Army of the North, then had taken his men and gone to his home province. He was cruel, hard, and typically Chinese. Lord of as many men as he could recruit to his standard, lord of as many peasants as the district he controlled reached, lord of life and death as far as his might carried.

He was not bad-looking, although his face was scarred with sword cuts. He claimed Manchu blood and probably had it, as his eyes did not slant up. His eyes lighted up as the lovely English girl entered the room. He could not speak very much English. A little, learned in Peking and Hongkong. Now he tried it. "It—gives me—pleas—I cannot say it—"

Katherine Neville, of the house that

had been noble in England since the days of William the Conqueror, smiled gayly. "Your English, my Lord Chow-yang, is as bad as my Chinese." She saw the hilt of a sword, gem-encrusted, at his side. If she could reach it—perhaps she could if she got close enough to him—she would sway in toward him and then—

Chow-yang smiled. "It is—true—I make—I hear better than speak. Come to the window and see—" He gave up trying to talk English and motioned. Katherine walked to the window. He stood beside her, but on her left. Unless she gained his left or got in front of him, she could not reach the sword hilt.

She looked down on the top of two wooden cages, hung about ten feet below the windows from iron hooks set in the wall. The hooks were some five feet below the windows, the cages, at the end of two-inch ropes about twelve feet in length, were about fifteen feet from the ground. Between the wall and the temple across the square, not more than two hundred yards was the gardens of Chow-yang, rich with many colored flowers.

"The men who—dared—defied me," he said blandly, with a wave of his hand down toward the cages. "Tomorrow, in the—" He did not know the English word for square, so he waved his hand around it. "They die—by Ling'ith."

He looked at the lovely face of the girl beside him. The sun had gone behind the hills and the soft velvety dusk had come, but it was still light enough to allow him to see that her lips had quivered for an instant.

"It may be," he went on, blandly, "that if you—asked—begged of me—in the morning, that their death—could be made—sudden."

Katherine Neville's proud little head went back and there was no quiver to her lips now. She stepped away from him, then in front, between him and the window. "The Fighting Yid," she said, slowly and distinctly, "and the Boston Bean are gentlemen, and would not allow me to do anything to save them at the expense of—"

She swayed in, as if from weakness and her little hand darted to his sword hilt. But Chow-yang had not won his War Lordship by being unalert or slow. Before her hand touched it, his left had closed over her wrist in a grip of steel. He raised her hand and arm as high as her shoulder, then his right hand closed on the white firm forearm and pressed in.

For an instant Katherine Neville stood there, then as the pain swept through her body, she screamed.

Chow-yang laughed. "You do—not like? I will tea—lesson you. See, I tighten once—again and then—"

CHAPTER IV.

TOO LATE.

LI TUNG stood up and shouted, "Lock! Lock! See! Lock!"

He pointed to the right. Jimmie Cordie raised his glasses. "I see a rock, but no one on it."

"They may be down at the side," said Grigsby, raising his own glasses. "It looks as bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard, at that. No one around in the valley, either. Looks as if the relief expedition arrived after the show was over."

The little valley that led up to the slope made a perfect landing place, no bumps or cracks and the pilot brought the plane down and taxied almost up to the rock.

"There may be some of the enemy holed up," Grigsby announced. "It's a cinch they could have seen us coming. Jimmie, you and Red get up there. Putt and I will cover you. Go with them, Li Tung, and make sure that is the rock."

"It's the right rock, all right," said Jimmie Cordie, as he and Red started with Li Tung. "The Bean and the Yid have left some markers."

They had, in the shape of several dead Chinese, who had been in the last rush. When the would-be rescuers reached the top, they looked down on the mute evidences of occupancy. The Chinese, when the first soldier had gained the top and waved them up, had taken everything that took their fancy, but had left empty cartridge shells, some beef cubes and rations. The Chinese had let them severely alone, fearing poison; also there were three or four canteens. The Chinese, not being fools, had seen at once what had happened. Just what had poisoned or drugged the three whites, they didn't know or care. They had their prisoners, so they only stayed long enough to pick up the 30-30's, the clothes, and other valuables.

"If there had been a fight," Jimmie Cordie said, slowly, as he looked around, "there would be blood around and dead men. The Yid and the Bean would have bitten some of them, if they were out of ammunition. There was no fight up here, that's one sure thing."

"Maybe-so they got tired of waiting," supplied Red, "and started to meet us. I thought we ought to have come in on the ground—"

"Write a letter about it," answered Jimmie, a puzzled frown on his face. "Would they leave without the canteens, dumb-bell?"

"And that reminds me," said Red. "'Tis thirsty I've been since morning. While ye are dopin' it out, Jimmie darlin', I'll get me a drink, if them scuts has left any."

"They couldn't have decoyed the Yid and the Bean down," went on Jimmie, to himself. "Those birds are too wise and they had a woman with them. They might have left this rock for a better place to stick around in till we came, but why in hell did they—"

He was interrupted by a curse from Red, who had tasted the water sparingly to see if it was foul.

"'Tis quare-tastin' stuff, Jimmie. Tastes like—like—now what in the name of all the saints does it taste like?"

Li Tung sprang forward, and touched the canteen to his lips, then spat carefully. "Dlugged! Dlugged!" He spoke some unfamiliar Chinese name.

"Drugged? How?" Jimmie Cordie snapped. "Was it drugged when you were here?"

"No, no!" The Chinese boy held his head in his hands. "We not drink from that befole I leave. That one of Captain Ethelington's canteens. I think—maybe-so—"

"Well, spit it out—what do ye think, ye scut?" Red growled.

"Easy does it," Jimmie warned. "What do you think, little brother?"

"I think maybe-so that Chi-sha put dlug in it. Chi-sha one of Captain Ethelington's boys. Captain find Chi-sha spoiling guns when we lun from Wal Lold Chow-yang. Captain dlive Chi-sha from camp—think Chi-sha in pay of Chow-yang. Maybe-so he put dlug in wate, tly to makee Captain Ethelington go vely dead long time, Chow-yang catchee."

"You're right, Li Tung," Jimmie

said slowly. “Red, that’s how it was. One of the bearers was in this War Lord’s pay, and tried to drug the crowd with knockout drops as they ran away. When the Bean and the Yid got to this canteen—blotto! Along comes the War Lord and carts them away.”

THEY went down the crevice, Jimmie carrying the canteen, and told Grigsby, Putney and the flyer, Mowbray, what Li Tung had told up on the rock.

“Who was this War Lord who was attacking you when you left, Li Tung?” asked Jimmie.

“Chow-yang,” answered the boy promptly.

“Do you know where this Chow-yang’s city is?”

“Flive—flifty miles—plenty know. That way—up and ddown—all the way.”

“That’s close; five or fifty miles. After Captain Etherington ran, Li Tung, how long was it before he got here to this rock?”

“One night. Maybe-so after sun come up, thlee owls.”

“Three owls?” interrupted Red. “What time keepin’ is that, I dunno. Come on, what’s the use of wah-wahin’ here? The Yid and the Bean may be still—”

“Hold it a minute, Red,” Putney interrupted. “This is bad country to go bull-rushing through. If we could land near the city it would be a darn sight better for us, and for the Yid and the Bean also, if this bird is saving them for anything.”

“How much gas have you, Mowbray?” asked Jimmie.

“Not enough to do any jazzing around, I’m afraid. I figured eight hundred miles and a little over. I gave you all the weight I could for ammuni-

tion, you know. We’ve come four twenty-five right now.”

“All right, that ends any figuring about the plane taking us. We can’t all go and leave the plane. Red and I will go with Li Tung.”

“Not so good, Jimmie. If you got in, what could you do, the two of you?”

“Darned if I know. Something might turn up. Red and I have been in places before and messed around, haven’t we, Red?”

“We have. Come on. I’ll pack gats for the Yid and Beany. Wid the four of us, what Chink can stop us?”

“No one Chink, ape,” answered Putney, with a grin, “but a million might.”

“I say,” said Mowbray, “I can do this, if I can find a place to land you. I can take you as close as I can, then go back and get some petrol. I’ll be much lighter, you know. If you lads can get in and make it back to where I drop you off, in ten hours, say, I’ll be back. That way you can all four go.”

“Boy,” said Jimmie Cordie, with a grin, “step on the gas or whatever it is you do, and make it snappy.”

Mowbray took them some ten miles in the hills and when Li Tung pointed out a mountain ahead and shouted, “City Yung-ning ovel hill,” he made a smooth three-point landing on a level space not much bigger than a pocket handkerchief.

“Well,” said Jimmie, as they unloaded machine guns and ammunition, “ten miles is much better than a kick in the neck, carrying this load. If we are not here, young feller, look for us on top of the rock.”

Mowbray grinned and waved his hand as he took off.

“Li Tung,” said Jimmie, “can you go ahead and get into the city without being stopped?”

"Can do. Plenty Chinaboy come and go."

"All right; you go ahead and find out if the girl and the white men are there and where they are, if you can. Is it a walled city?"

"Not on hill side. In front, plenty wall."

"Can we get in or close up without being seen?"

"Maybe-so, come night—same way Captain Ethelington got out."

"This path leads to the city?"

"Yes, to livel, then down livel to little hill, then into city."

"Follow the river? Fair enough," grinned Jimmie Cordie. "Get going, little brother, and if you can, come back to us."

"I come," answered Li Tung firmly.

"Ain't that somepin?" demanded Red, as Li Tung ran up the path. "We will walk in, get the Yid and Beany and the girl and walk out to the bus widout a fight at all. Why the hell don't we go in the front way and slap them outta their nightgowns? To Red, the thought of going anywhere and not getting a fight was very displeasing.

"I have a feelin', Red, old settler," answered Grigsby, "that while we may walk in, on the way out we are going to get all the fight we want handed to us; so stick around."

CHAPTER V.

CAGED.

THE Yid and the Boston Bean came to about the same time.

They were in Chinese punishment cages. These are built so that the persons in them can neither stand up straight, lie down or sit down without doubling up somewhere. It doesn't sound like anything very bad, but in a

few short hours, the muscular pain becomes almost unbearable.

The cages were side by side, open affairs with bars of bamboo about three inches apart.

The Yid stirred and tried to stand up, only to rap his head on the roof of the cage. On the way in, he had moved in the arms of his captors and had been promptly rapped over the head with a sword hilt. The wound had bled a lot and the blood had run down and dried on his linen underwear, which was all the clothing he had been left. Even his shoes and stockings were gone. The Yid was short and roly-poly, seeming about four feet broad across the shoulders; but at that, most of him was muscle instead of fat.

He touched his head, felt around the cage, felt of the bars, tried to sit down; couldn't, without bending his very sore head, and then said, "Vell, how in hell I got in here in de monkey cage, is vay beyond me." He wiggled around and surveyed another cage within three feet of his.

"Hey, Beaneater," he said, with firm conviction, "ve drank it de doped vater, und ve yake up in de cage. Beany? Vake up! Time for anodder drink." The Yid's nerve was intact, steady as ever.

"I don't have to wake up," answered the Bean, through the bars of his cage. "I am already awake, thank you. You're all dressed up, in your B. V. D.'s. Glad they left me my pants."

"Vare is Miss Neville?"

"That's what is worrying me," answered the Bean. "If we are somewhere in cages, where is she?"

"If I could answer dot kvestion, I could—ouch, oi, my back it already feels like dot it is full of red-hot needles—hey, vot de hell?"

"Oh, my God," whispered the Bean, and he fought the bars of his cage. Katherine Neville's scream had reached them.

The Bean was a strong man, strong in every muscle and like steel wire, but the cage he was in was a new one and he could not, on account of his height, get any kind of leverage. He did loosen one bar before he sank as best he could to the floor, a huddled heap, every bit of his strength gone. He had put it all in the effort.

The Yid, even as the scream lasted, was turned into a raging dynamo of fury. He literally went crazy. The Yid, when he saw any child or woman in pain, would do anything to stop it. As the face of the lovely girl who had smiled at him and called him Mr. Cohen, and who was, as the Yid had announced to the Bean, "von game kid," came to his bloodshot eyes, the Yid went berserk.

The cage he was in was an old one, although it was still strong enough to hold a Chinese prisoner, who, strangely enough, would never try to burst out, but would bear the pain until death, as stoically as an Indian.

The Yid crouched, his broad back against the back of the cage, and put his big feet against two of the bars. The cage was built for just such a pry, also. He straightened out and the bars and all in front went flying out, the Yid almost going with them. He never waited an instant. Like a great cat he was out, on top of the cage, and swarming up the rope. From the hook, he could stand out and reach the low-cut window sill. As his hands closed on it and he drew himself up, Katherine Neville screamed again. This time the scream stopped with a gurgle. She had seen the Yid coming in. At least, she saw the bulk of him coming through

the window, as the moon was now faintly shining.

AS she stopped, Chow-yang saw by her eyes that she had seen something and he dropped her arm, turning to face whatever it was.

It was plenty for any one man to face, or any two. The Yid came down on him, arms outstretched, fingers bent, great shoulders hunched. The Yid's face in repose was a handsome one, but now he looked very much like some great prehistoric ape.

Chow-yang was no coward, but his face went gray as his hand flashed to the sword hilt that Katherine Neville had tried for. His hand reached it, and the shimmering blade was a foot out of the sheath, when the Yid reached him.

Katherine Neville, her back to the wall by the window, saw Chow-yang, War Lord of the city of Yung-ning, bend slowly back, one of the Yid's great arms around the small of his back, one hand at his face, covering it. The Yid's body seemed to sway forward and then she heard a snap, as if a tree limb had broken.

The Yid released Chow-yang, who crumpled to the floor, his back broken. As he went down, the Yid drew the sword from the silken sash and cut down, once. The War Lord Chow-yang, from his room in the heart of his palace where he was surrounded by guards and swordsmen, went on high to join his ancestors. Those on guard outside may have heard some unusual noise, must have heard the screams; but until their master called or signaled, they would have no more gone in than they would enter the cage of a tiger.

The Yid, as he raised the sword from the heart of Chow-yang came back

from berserkland. He looked at Katherine Neville and grinned.

"Und dot is dot. Vare do ve go from here?"

"Well," said a voice from the window, a critical voice at that. "If I were you, Yid, I'd go and get some clothes on. Double shame' on you."

The Yid whirled around. "Oi! Jimmie! Now ve is rescued und everything!"

"You are counting your chickens a long time before they're out of the incubator," answered Jimmie Cordie, sternly. "Come on, through the window. You are Miss Neville?"

"Yes, I—oh, are we—"

"You are. Talk about it later."

A burst of machine gun fire came from under the window, one round, two, three, and the *bang-bang-bang* of Winchesters. Then silence for a moment, as far as gunfire went. There were shouts and the sound of running feet. As Jimmie lowered Katherine Neville down to the hook, where the Yid, who had gone first, was waiting to help her down on top of the Bean's cage, the door of the room opened.

"Catch her, Yid," Jimmie called. He had one leg over the window sill. As he let go her wrists he drew his Colt.

The swordsmen coming in hesitated a minute, then, urged on from behind, charged across the room. It was their last charge, this running with naked swords into soft-nosed lead bullets that hit with the force of a ton and more. Jimmie Cordie sat there, half in and half out of the window and killed the first four with bullets squarely between the eyes. As they fell, the others behind them turned and ran back, out of the door.

"Oi, Jimmie," yelled the Yid from below. "Hand me down de pig sticker till I cut de Beaneater loose."

Jimmie Cordie laughed, drew his other leg up and calmly stepped into the room, picked up the sword and went back to the window.

"Tell Jimmie to hurry up," called Grigsby, from under the cages. "They are ganging up for a rush and—hop to it, Red!"

THE machine gun opened fire once more as Jimmie slid down the rope from the hook. Katherine Neville had been held down at arm's-length by the Yid and dropped the rest of the way, to be caught in Red Dolan's brawny arms and landed without a jar. The Yid had the sword between the bars of Bean's cage and was prying and cutting at the same time.

Jimmie Cordie leaned over and tried to reach the hilt to give a hand. As he did, the already much tried rope gave way and, as in the old song, down came cage, Beaneater and all. When they reached the ground there was no more need to pry the Bean loose. The cage was a wreck and the Bean was out of it. He picked himself up and began feeling tenderly of several places. The Yid and Jimmie Cordie had ridden it down and were not badly bruised.

"All right, Codfish," said Grigsby. "Latch on to a gun and get busy. Feel of yourself after the battle."

The Bean grinned and picked up a 30-30. "I'm not hurt—except in my feelings," he said, as the butt went against his cheek.

"Come on, Yid," shouted Jimmie, "get on this gun with me. Putt, take the other with George. Red, you and the Bean cover us. In here, Miss Neville. Straight out! Beside me, Li Tung! Which way?"

"Lite! Lite!" shouted the boy. "To the wall gate."

There was a fast, silent charge of

swordsmen across the square and from the palace. It came in front and both sides, right and left. The moon was much brighter now and it was almost as light as day. Chow-yang's men were fighting men, born and bred in a hard school. They had fought with him in the south, and with him had looted many cities. They had no machine guns and not many rifles, but they knew what they were; and they knew also that they numbered a hundred to one against the white men who stood with their backs to the wall. But they were charging against men who were also veterans, men who could serve a machine gun in the face of overwhelming odds and laugh as they did it.

Jimmie Cordie picked up Grigsby's line of fire and sent a cross-stream of steel over it. The Bean and Red Dolan, back to back, stopped the thinner rush from the sides with their Winchesters.

The charge in front wavered, steadied, then came on, wavered again and then broke, and those who still could ran for cover on either side. Two machine guns properly handled, can, as the Yid said, "do a lot of dirty vork at de crossroads, ain't it?"

"All right," shouted Jimmie Cordie. "Let's go! We'll take the rear, George."

They went slowly to the right across the square. First Grigsby and Putney with a machine gun, then the Bean with Katherine Neville then Jimmie Cordie and the Yid with the other gun, and with them Red Dolan, thoroughly in his element. Twice, as they crossed, a rush came, only to be wiped out and beaten back; and now, from the palace windows came gunfire. Jimmie Cordie raised the muzzle of the Browning and swept the windows clear, as calmly and

coldly as a surgeon would probe for a bullet.

They reached the gate and Li Tung opened it. When they got through, he closed it after them. No hurry, no slamming it, just a leisurely closing. This Chinese boy Li Tung had fighting blood in him from some ancestor. There was a good deal of noise in the city behind them, but as they walked toward the hills, there seemed to be no pursuit.

CHAPTER VI.

PURSUED.

GRIGSBY had a slug of some kind in the fleshy part of his left arm, near the elbow. Red Dolan had been neatly cut above the ear by a bullet. Putney had been hit in the right shoulder, high up, but the bullet had gone through. The rest were untouched, except for the bruises the Yid and the Bean had collected.

Katherine Neville walked alongside the Bean. "Let me carry your gun," she said. "I—oh, my goodness!"

"What's the matter?"

"My arm hurt me. It was where he gripped it." She held up her white slender arm like a child, for the Bean to see. There were four black and blue marks. The Bean swore softly under his breath as he looked at them.

"I screamed," she confessed. "I didn't want to, but he hurt me so."

"My gosh," answered the Bean. "Any one would have screamed. I bet I would have screamed two or three times. At that, it was your scream that brought Jimmie and the rest."

Red Dolan dropped back to them. Katherine Neville looked up at the hard, lean face with the cold blue eyes, and then as every woman and child did,

she saw the real Red underneath and she smiled.

"I want to thank you," she began, "for coming and—"

"Oi!" yelled the Yid. "Here dey come, mit horses und everything!"

"On that slope," called Grigsby. "Star front; take the point, Jimmie! Red—Beaneater! Take the sides. Half circle, Jimmie!"

The Yid was right about the "and-everything." Men poured out of the gates of the city on three sides as well as the little portal they had come through. Mounted as well as on foot, they had with them two old brass cannon, dragged by gun crews and coolies.

By this time the fleeing party had come about a mile. For the first half of the distance, the Chinese came on slowly. The moon was now bright, and the little group on the top of a gentle slope could see the advancing enemy spread to surround the hill. The two cannon came straight on.

"If you get hit with one of those cannon balls, Yid," said Jimmie Cordie with a laugh, "you needn't mind about any clothes. Those babies throw a ball as big as a washtub, no fooln'."

"Oi, Jimmie! For vy you vish it to me the bad luck? I am still sick from dot vater—"

"Start her off, Jimmie," called Grigsby. "No use in letting them get too close."

"Jimmie," pleaded the Yid, "knock off dem guys mit de big brass poppers first. I esk it as a favor." All of the six reckless, unafraid soldiers of fortune laughed as they began to pull trigger; and Katherine Neville joined in with Jimmie Cordie's 30-30. She could shoot a rifle, this dainty girl, and she was as unafraid as they.

Jimmie Cordie picked up the men at the cannon with the first round and

they dropped like leaves blown from a tree. Grigsby poured a sleet of steel into the mounted men who had hardly got started, and Jimmie's gun swung around to pick up the fire from where he had started back.

Already men were running back toward the city. It takes cold nerve, or hot blood, or iron discipline, to charge into machine gun fire. Or an extreme of patriotism—and the Chinese had none of it. Not that they were not brave, for most Chinese are, but they knew that the master they had served and feared was dead. They were mostly mercenaries and this idea of getting themselves killed where there was no prospect of loot or even hand-to-hand fighting didn't appeal to many of them. Those that did come on were the men of the city, led by the interpreter. They numbered about a hundred, and long before they got in close enough for swordplay both machine guns were full on them.

The interpreter was lifted from his horse and hurled to the ground as if hit by a giant hammer, his body almost cut in two. When he went down, a few horsemen turned and fled; the rest couldn't run.

"I think," said Jimmie Cordie, as he stood up, "that will be about all for the moment."

"Moment is right," said Putney, pushing the pack he had made from half his coat and shirt into the wound in his shoulder as far as he could. "Let's get goin', Jimmie. My shoulder is commencing to bother me."

"My gosh," said Jimmie, staring at Grigsby's arm, down which a trickle of blood was running. "Did you shoot that gun with a wounded arm, you big ape?"

"No, young feller," answered Grigsby with a smile. "I shot it with my

right hand. What do you think Putt and I were doing, taking pictures?"

"Yeah? I hope I've still got that iodine in my pack. We'll make it back to where we started from and then I'll operate on you two blame fools."

"**V**AT a nice night for a walk," said the Yid, as they started. "Vait—I get me some clothes, ain't it?" He started down the slope toward the nearest bodies.

"Come back here, ye grave robber," yelled Red, but the Yid paid no attention to him. "Take the first suit that fits you, Abie," called Jimmie Cordie. "Don't shop around. It looks like—here they come again! Yid! Get back here!"

Whoever it was that had taken command in the city after Chow-yang's death, had stopped the unorganized rushes. Now a body of troops came out of the gates and split up into three columns. One went on a fast dog-trot far out to the right, another to the left. The column in the center came forward slowly, giving the other two plenty of time to get on the left and right of the little group on the slope.

"Not so good," said Grigsby. "They'll box us in. Get going; we can beat 'em to the pass. From now on, gents—and ladies—there will be straight shootin', no foolin'. Here's a chance for Red and Jimmie to do that slapping-out-of-the-way thing."

"Give us room according to our size and disposition, and we'll do that little thing," answered Jimmie, with a grin. "Won't we, Red?"

"All the time," agreed Red.

They made the pass, with but a hundred yards to spare as the three columns converged. And there they stood and did their straight shooting. These Chinese were under officers who drove

them forward, and when the attackers finally weakened and drew back out of range, there was no more machine gun ammunition. Jimmie Cordie and Red calmly shattered the firing mechanism with bullets from their Colts.

Little Li Tung regretfully surrendered to Jimmie the Winchester with which he thought he was doing frightful execution, and they started up the pass. It was a slow advance. The Chinese would close in, only to be driven back; the party would advance a hundred yards more and have to make another stand.

It was dawn now and the sun was beginning to be felt. There was little attempt to attack from the sides of the pass. They were too steep to climb, most of the way, and once a man got up there, he had no way to get ahead of the moving party below. The Chinese tried it twice and both times slid down back of the column, to be promptly shot down.

Grigsby's arm was hurting him badly now and Putney's shoulder had stiffened. Both Katherine Neville and Li Tung had fallen heir to rifles now, Grigsby and Putney using their Colts. That left the Bean, the Yid, Jimmie and Red. Four first-rate rifles, in the hands of men who are all dead shots, can hold back a good many men not armed with the same. Katherine Neville was a good shot, but Li Tung had the universal Chinese habit of pointing his gun in the general direction of the object he wanted to hit, shutting his eyes, and cutting loose.

They fought their way slowly up the pass. No panic, no flurry, just a cold, merciless beating back of attack from wherever it came. But the ammunition was getting low and there seemed to be just as many Chinese as ever.

As they came out in the little valley

where Mowbray had left them, they saw that he had not got back.

"He stopped for tea somewhere en route," Jimmie Cordie laughed to Grigsby, who was beside him.

"Let's hope he didn't wait for the jam to be spread on the cakes," answered Grigsby grimly. "Look at our boy-friends behind us."

"Oi," said the Yid, who had joined them. "All Shang-si has come to de party, ain't it, Jimmie?"

"Right now," answered Jimmie Cordie with a grin, "I'd like to be on top of your rock, Yid. Next time you want to be rescued, for Pete's sake stay put."

"Oi, Jimmie! Could I know that the—" The Yid's Winchester drowned the rest. The charge against them this time was the most deadly of all. Putney, his Colt rising and falling with the regularity of clockwork, began crooning an old song. He always did when hard pressed. This time it was, "Oh, my darling Nellie Gray," and every other word was punctuated with a *pow!* Red Dolan stood as if on the rifle range, his eyes the same frosty blue, giving the matter in hand his undivided attention.

The Yid, beside Jimmie Cordie, was talking and shooting at the same time. "Oi, Jimmie, vot luffy shootin'. Knock 'em off, Jimmie. Oi, vot wouldn't I gif for just von little rat-tat baby—oi, vot ve could do to dem. My goodness, dey is almost here, ain't it?"

The Bean sat down, his back to a rock. The drug he had swallowed had about cleared his stomach, but every once in awhile he felt a wave of sickness. He sat there, his lean, aristocratic face as calm and indifferent as if watching a polo game that bored him. The only thing he said was, "Really, Putney, I wish you'd pull over a little. You are blocking my line

of fire." Putney didn't pay the slightest attention.

KATHERINE NEVILLE crawled on her hands and knees over to where the Bean sat, dragging a rifle with her. As she sat up beside him, the Bean smiled. "Hullo, Neville, are you still alongside?"

"Yes," she answered, returning the smile, her lovely face powder-grimed, but unafraid. "If we—don't stop them—I—would like to have you the one that killed me," she went on calmly, as she raised her rifle.

"What?" gasped the Bean. "If we—they're stopped already!"

They were; at least, they were wavering and not coming forward as fast. It was a hard charge to carry home, this charging in on men who killed with every shot and who stood so confidently with a never-ending supply of bullets. Some of the Chinese fell purposely as if shot down, others turned and ran. The charge, as a charge, had failed. But it had won, if the Chinese had only known it. The little band of fugitives had not, all told, one hundred rounds left of any kind of cartridges.

"See?" went on the Bean, who was feeling better. "Now all we have to do is to wait and ride home in state."

"Home? Why—I haven't any home, now," and the blue eyes filled with tears. "I—Uncle Bertie took care of me, and—"

"And now I am going to," the Bean concluded, as politely as if he were chatting with a guest on board his yacht at Nice. "I'll be your Uncle Bean-eater from Boston."

Katherine Neville looked at him and a real smile appeared behind the tears. "You are too young to be my uncle, John." Up on the rock, the Bean had told her his right name.

"Wait till we get home. I've got it all settled in my own mind. If you'll—" But the Beaneater was interrupted by Jimmie Cordie.

"Come on, you and Miss Neville. We'd better be hiking toward the nearest airport."

As they marched toward the meeting-place, they saw, far off in the sky in the direction of Chi-kow, a black speck that steadily grew larger.

"Well," the Boston Bean said to the girl beside him, "didn't I tell you? Here we are, rescued and all that. Now, as for home—won't you let me—take care of you?"

"Do you want to, really, John?" she inquired, smiling up at him.

"I do," said the Bean, gravely. "Very much indeed—forever—that is,

if you—" and John Cabot Winthrop, dead shot, reckless soldier of fortune, and gentleman unafraid, stammered like a schoolboy.

"Go on, John," she encouraged. "Whatever it is, I do." And they both laughed.

A few minutes later Mowbray landed, bumping along over the grass. He had with him another young man and two machine guns.

"Oh, I say," he protested in a disappointed tone as he got out of the plane. "It really isn't all over, is it?"

Jimmie Cordie, who had been watching the Bean and the lovely English girl, grinned. "It's just starting, young feller. Oh, you mean the fighting. Yes, the fighting is all over. What kept you?"

THE END.



Hindu "Hexes" and Iron

ONE of the popular Hindu superstitions is the potency of iron as a counteracting influence on evil spirits. Many Hindu *fakirs* follow the practice of branding their limbs with hot irons. An iron weapon is often placed at the bedside of an expectant mother. In the Punjab the natives used to follow the custom of placing an iron pot before a house in the process of erection. Native bridegrooms wear iron swords at the marriage ceremony, and iron rings are common pieces of native household jewelry. The explanation may be given that iron is the metal from which weapons are forged, and the armed man need fear nothing. At any rate iron is potent as a scarer of the Hindu demon.

Not only in India has iron come to importance as a powerful negative force to evil. The ancient Roman sage Pliny claimed that iron placed in the nest of a hen would save the eggs from destruction. Canadian Indians have been known to brandish swords to scare off storm demons. An old Irish legend has it that an iron ring will cure rheumatism. An anvil used to be considered an excellent caller of rain, and who can doubt the good luck enhanced by the finding of a horseshoe? The horseshoe's mythical power is not only believed in our cultured Western nation, but in Asia. Many native shrines are decorated with horse-shoes and the mosque gate at Fatehpur-Sikri was once nailed over with them.

Theodore Roscoe.



"You're letting them send me to the chair!"

A Reptile Named Robard

Gillian Hazeltine, greatest of criminal lawyers, plays a shrewd and risky game to save his home and friends from blackmail's horrors

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "The Haunted Yacht Club," "The Silver Fang," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

GILLIAN HAZELTINE, the great criminal lawyer, is astounded and shocked to overhear his wife Vee-Anne making an appointment with Don Robard, a wealthy idler and philanderer. Victor Henshaw, the respected publisher of the *Greenboro Morning Times*, overhears the conversation also; and he tells Hazeltine that the affair is already a matter of common gossip. Henshaw goes on to say that he himself is about to commit suicide, on account of Ro-

bard, who is blackmailing him through his knowledge that Henshaw was once imprisoned for manslaughter after a barroom fight. Robard, living on Henshaw's hard-earned money, is breaking up homes, mixing in bootlegging, and generally becoming a community plague. He has demanded that Henshaw deed over half his property; and the publisher chooses rather to kill himself. Gillian tells him to wait.

When Vee-Anne returns from her clandestine meeting, Gillian starts out

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with the intention of killing Robard. Then an inspiration strikes him; and he learns, at the morgue, that a murdered bootlegger was found around midnight, floating in the river. Henshaw tells him that Robard was at his house about that time, pressing his blackmail demands. Gillian tells the publisher to disappear for a while; he has a scheme afoot. It appears that the chief of police has been waiting for a chance to get Robard, who had double-crossed him on a bootleg deal; and so Robard is charged with murdering the bootlegger, one Herman Ochas.

Vee-Anne, highly perturbed, begs Gillian to defend Don Robard; and the lawyer, hiding his knowledge of her meetings with the man, agrees. The trial starts, with highly damning evidence which has been framed up by the bootleggers. Adelbert Yistle, district attorney and Hazeltine's long-time opponent, foresees victory; and Gillian does little to defend Robard, playing on the man's cowardice and pointing out that they simply must have an alibi. Robard's story, even to Hazeltine, is that he was at his apartment, alone; and he naturally can produce no witness to the fact.

CHAPTER V—(Continued).

ON TRIAL FOR HIS LIFE.

THE witness, who had just identified Robard as the man who had been in his hot-dog stand with Ochas just before the murder, was saying: "Of course, it's none o' my business listening to the talk that goes on between two of my customers. I'm not that kind. But there wasn't anybody else in my restaurant, and they talked so loud I couldn't help hearing. Must I tell what they were saying?"

"You have sworn," Mr. Yistle answered, "to tell the truth and the whole truth. Proceed, Mr. Murchison."

Mr. Murchison sighed and continued.

"Well, they began talkin' about some deal they had on to sell a lot of liquor. Mr. Robard over there had bought a lot of liquor from some prohibition agents who had confiscated it in a raid. And he had turned it over to poor old Herman Ochas. He wanted to know where the money from it was, and Herman said that he didn't have the money and he didn't have the liquor, because somebody found his cache and had stolen all the liquor."

Mr. Yistle interrupted: "Mr. Murchison, can you remember their exact words?"

"I can remember some of 'em. Mr. Robard said: 'Herman, I think you're a lying scoundrel and a sneak.' And Herman said: 'Mr. Robard, I wouldn't lie to any man. You ought to know, from your past experience, how crooked the men in this liquor racket are. Somebody got into that shed and got away with all that booze. And Mr. Robard kept saying that Herman was an out-and-out liar and a thief and a lot of other names that I can't mention with ladies present. And Herman kept protesting that he wasn't a liar or a thief.'"

"Did Herman Ochas lose his temper?"

"No, sir; he did not. Herman was always a quiet, peaceable man."

"Did the accused—Mr. Robard—lose his temper?"

"Yes, sir; he did. And I got pretty scared. He kept calling Herman a liar and a scoundrel and a crook and a river rat—every name he could lay his tongue to—and finally he said: 'You

know, don't you, what happens in this business to men who double cross?" And Herman said: "Please don't talk like that, Mr. Robard. I never double crossed you. That liquor was stolen out of that shed." And when he said that, Mr. Robard jumped up, and there was a gun in his hand."

"A revolver or a pistol?"

"A revolver, it was—a big blue revolver. I just caught a glimpse of it, and then he shoved it right back into his pocket, as if he'd changed his mind about something."

Gillian was on his feet. "I object to that, your honor. It is assumption."

"Sustained," ruled Judge Helman.

Don Robard whispered fiercely: "My God, Gillian, is that all you're going to object to?"

"It's all I can legally object to."

"But don't you realize that every word he said is a lie? Don't you see that they're building up the most spurious kind of a case?"

"Of course I do. But nothing can be done about it."

"You mean to say," Robard panted, his eyes blazing into Gillian's, "that you're going to sit here like this while they bring on witness after witness to stuff that jury with their lies?"

"I am helpless," said Gillian.

"Well, I'm not." Don Robard jumped up. In his rich, deep, musical voice he cried: "Your honor, I object to this. That man is a liar. Every word he has uttered is a lie. He never saw me before he entered this court room. I was never in his restaurant—his hot-dog stand!"

A BAILIFF was banging with his gavel. The court room burst into humming conversation. The bailiff banged. Judge Helman gazed sternly at Don Robard.

"You are represented by competent counsel. Anything you wish to say to the jury or to this bench must be uttered through your counsel."

"But—"

"The State will proceed."

Don Robard, mopping his dark, handsome face, sat down and looked at Gillian dazedly. Then his eyes cleared. He whispered hoarsely:

"It's a frame-up. A cold-blooded frame-up! And I believe you're in it. I don't believe you're going to lift a hand to save me!"

"Calm yourself, Don," Gillian soothed him. "When the time comes, I will exert every effort to save you. But the time hasn't come. Don—if only you could produce an alibi witness!"

The blackmailer glared at him suspiciously a moment longer, then relapsed again into brooding silence.

Mr. Yistle, with silence restored, said: "You may go on, Mr. Murchison. You were saying that the accused produced a blue revolver, then returned it to his pocket. What happened then?"

"Well, sir, a sort of funny look came into his eyes. It was a sort of a calculating look. And he said, in a funny voice, 'Well, Herman, I guess nothing is to be gained by arguing. Let's take a walk down to that shed.' And Herman said, 'All right, Mr. Robard; I want you to be certain that I'm not a liar or a double crosser.'"

"They went out," said Mr. Murchison, "and that was the last I ever saw of my old friend Herman. The next thing I knew, Mr. Robard had shot him with that revolver."

"I object to that!" Gillian barked. "Did the witness see the accused shoot Herman Ochas?"

"No, sir. I heard about it, though."

"Strike that from the record," or—

dered Judge Helman in his mournful voice.

Mr. Yistle was wearing a catlike smile. He had done very well with this witness.

"That will be all. Does my esteemed friend wish to take this witness?"

His esteemed friend did wish to cross-examine the witness. Gillian got up and walked over to within a yard of Mr. Murchison and gazed at him steadily for several seconds.

"Mr. Murchison, are you quite sure that the man who came into your restaurant at about ten o'clock on the night of September 16 was Mr. Robard?"

"Yes, sir," the witness defiantly answered; "I am dead certain."

"How are your eyes?"

"They are fine."

"How is the lighting in your restaurant?"

"It is a fine lighting system."

"And there is no doubt in your mind that Mr. Robard was the man who came into your restaurant that night with Herman Ochas?"

"I said I was sure, didn't I?"

"Mr. Murchison, were you ever arrested on a criminal charge?"

"No, sir; never," said the witness.

"That will be all."

Judge Helman said: "We will take a recess for lunch. The jury will retire."

CHAPTER VI.

DRAWING THE NOOSE.

GILLIAN accompanied Don Robard back to his cell. His client was in a nasty mood.

"I mean it," said Robard. "I'm suspicious of you. I don't think you

have the slightest intention of trying to save me. I think you're part of the frame-up."

"Why," Gillian dryly inquired, "don't you change counsel? It's permissible, you know."

"Who would I get?"

"You might try Clarence Darrow, except that he's in Europe."

Don Robard was perspiring. He paced to and fro in his narrow cell. He suddenly turned and whipped out:

"Look here, Gillian; you haven't got anything against me, have you?"

Gillian gasped in convincing amazement. "What could have put such a thought into your head?"

"I don't understand you?"

"Very few people do," admitted the Silver Fox.

"I'd certainly hate to have you against me. I know how you treat your enemies. I know that more than one man you hated was tickled to death to get out of this town with his life—and never come back."

"That," Gillian agreed, "has happened to some of my enemies. When I have it in for a man, he is usually sorry. Because I'm like an elephant, because I never forget or forgive a man who does me wrong or who does wrong to any one I'm fond of."

"But have I ever done any wrong to you?"

"If you have," said Gillian, "you would certainly know about it, wouldn't you?"

Don Robard was now sweating freely, and the heat of his cell was not entirely accountable. His eyes, for the first time, had a hunted look.

"Would you mind," he burst out, "if I changed lawyers?"

"Not at all, Don. Whom would you like to have?"

Don Robard clasped his hands and

began again to pace. He stopped and said, in his deep, melodious voice:

"But if I retained a new lawyer, and if you had something against me, you'd still somehow get me."

"It seems to me," said Gillian, "that you are building up a hypothetical case. But if it were true—yes, I would still get you. If I wanted to get you, I would."

"But you're actually trying to save me."

"My sworn duty to every client is to try to save him. And how easily, Don, I could save you—if you hadn't been abed asleep on the night of September 16. If you had only been visiting some reputable and credible citizen of Greenboro!"

Don Robard stared at him a moment longer, then fell to rubbing his hands and pacing again.

A deputy sheriff came down the corridor and said: "The jury's in, Mr. Hazeltine."

Gillian had gone without lunch, but he did not regret it. Unless he was mistaken, Don Robard was beginning to weaken. It would not be long before he cracked. And Gillian wanted to see the streak of yellow which he knew dominated Robard's make-up.

THE State's first witness for the afternoon session was a bright-faced old Irishwoman who gave her name as Maggie O'Toole. She smiled pertly at the jury; she smiled pertly at Mr. Yistle, at the judge, at Gillian. Only upon Don Robard did she bestow an unfriendly glance. Her twinkling eyes became steady and dark. One corner of her generous mouth lifted up a little.

Robard whispered to Gillian, "What whopping lies is she going to tell?"

"We shall see," said Gillian.

"You aren't worried?"

"Not at all. Truth, Don, has a way of finding its path through the most intricate maze of lies."

But Don Robard looked unconvinced.

Mr. Yistle was questioning the witness: "What is your occupation?"

"You mean my job?" retorted the pert old Irishwoman. "I'm a scrub lady. I scrub floors. I empty wastebaskets and garboons in the Atchison Building."

"At what hour do you go to work?"

"I go to work at six so sharp that you could set a clock by me!"

The court room tittered. The bailiff brought his gavel down and glared.

"And at what hour do you stop working, Mrs. O'Toole?"

"At half past ten, sir."

"Then you go home?"

"I do, sir; yes, sir."

"Where do you live, Mrs. O'Toole?"

"In the boarding house that I run down by the gas tanks on River Street."

"You walk home?"

"Yes, sir. I'm a strong, healthy woman, sir."

"I'm sure we're glad to know that, Mrs. O'Toole. Now, I want you to tell the jury if anything interesting happened while you were walking home along River Street at about half past ten on the night of September 16."

"I was walkin' along River Street," responded Mrs. O'Toole, "mindin' me own business, as usual, when I saw two men comin' down the street toward me. They were 'walkin' along slow, and they were talkin' loud and fast. At least one of them was."

"Did you see those men's faces?"

"I did, sir. They were near a street light when we passed."

"Did you recognize either of them?"

"I recognized one of them, sir, as Herman Ochas, the bootlegger. He boarded with me, sir, and a nice, clean, good-natured man he was, sir. Always prompt to pay his room rent. Always with a cheery word for everybody. Always stoopin' down to pat some stray child or dog on the head, sir."

"It seems to me, your honor," Gillian interrupted, "that the witness is dealing in irrelevancies."

"The witness," ordered Judge Helman, "will confine herself to direct answers to questions."

"But I was answerin' the question direct, judge," protested Mrs. O'Toole. "He ast me did I reco'nize poor Herman Ochas, and all I said was yes!"

It was again necessary for the bailiff to use his gavel to stop the laughter. Mr. Yistle then resumed his examination.

"**D**ID you recognize the man with whom Herman Ochas was walking?"

"Not at the time, sir. But I reco'nize him right now. It's that black scoundrel sittin' over there wit' murder for me in his eyes!"

Judge Helman turned to her impatiently. "I must ask you, again, Mrs. O'Toole, to answer questions directly. If you recognize the man, in this court room, whom you saw walking with Herman Ochas, you may indicate him and answer in the affirmative."

Maggie O'Toole indicated Don Robard by stretching out a long skinny arm and pointing an extremely red forefinger at him.

"There he sits, the rascal!"

Don Robard looked bored, uneasy and indignant.

Mr. Yistle promptly helped the wit-

ness. "That man sitting over there in the gray suit?"

"That's the rascal!"

"Gillian," Robard whispered huskily, "can't you do anything about that lying old hag?"

"Wait," Gillian counseled.

Mr. Yistle: "Mrs. O'Toole, you say you recognized Herman Ochas, and you say you can now identify this man, the accused, as his companion that night."

"I say it, and I say it again!"

"Very well. When you passed them, did you overhear any of their conversation?"

"Indeed, I did, sir. I heard enough to scare me half out of me shoes! I heard that rascal over there say: 'I won't tell you again what happens in this business to double crossers!' And as plain as the nose on my face, I heard poor Herman Ochas say, 'But I haven't double crossed you, Mr. Robard. Please don't shoot a man who hasn't done you any wrong.'"

Even the ladies and gentlemen of the jury were leaning forward. The mouths of most of the spectators were ajar. Don Robard was sitting stiffly upright, his jaw muscles bulging, his eyes blazing at Maggie O'Toole. He turned to Gillian.

"Do you mean to say," he demanded in a hoarse whisper, "that you're going to let her get away with that?"

"What has she said," Gillian returned, "that I can legally object to? Of course, she's lying. You know it. I know it."

"But the jury doesn't know it!"

"The jury will!"

"But how, man, how?"

"Wait," cautioned Gillian. "Our time will come."

And he gave the blackmailer a

glance which might have been likened to that of a wheeling hawk in the air, watching the struggles of a rabbit that has been caught in a trap.

The questions and answers continued. Said Mr. Yistle:

"Mrs. O'Toole, did you clearly hear Herman Ochas say: 'Please don't shoot a man who hasn't done you any wrong?'"

"Indeed I did, sir."

"Did you hear any more of their conversation?"

"Nothing as clear as that, sir. The rest I heard was just broken-up words. Mr. Robard was cursing and swearing, and Herman Ochas was pleadin' with him."

"When these two men passed on, what did you do, Mrs. O'Toole?"

"I just stood there on the sidewalk, like I was frozen to it—so scairt I was. And I watched them walk away. I watched 'em till they went around the corner into Polk Street."

"Which way did they turn?"

"T'ward the river, sir—t'ward the old salt dock."

"And you stood there, scared, did you, Mrs. O'Toole, until those two men were gone from sight toward the old salt dock?"

"I did, sir. I was too scared to move."

"And then what did you do?"

"I scampered along home, sir. And I waited up for Herman Ochas to come in. I waited till three o'clock in the mornin', and then I went up to his room and sat m'self down on the edge of his bed, and there I sat till the sun came up, waitin' and worryin' and wonderin'. But he never come home. All that time I was settin' on the edge of his bed, he was lyin' there, cold and stiff, in the morgue! And this rascal was makin' his getaway from the scene

of his crime—the cold-blooded murderer!"

"Objection!" Gillian roared.

"Sustained. Strike that last sentence from the record."

"That will be all," stated Mr. Yistle.

"**N**OW, get up," prompted Don Robard frantically, "and tell her what a liar she is."

Gillian arose. He walked over to Mrs. O'Toole and smiled at her. The Irishwoman gave him a glance in return.

"Mrs. O'Toole," he said gently, "you came into this court room to-day to help us find the murderer of Herman Ochas, did you not?"

"I did, that. And I hope I've done my little bit."

"Let us all hope so, Mrs. O'Toole. On the night of September 16, when you were walking home from your employment and you overheard the conversation between Herman Ochas and the accused, may I ask if you had been drinking?"

The scrub lady glared at him.

"A nice, polite question that is to ask a decent, respectable, hard-working woman!"

"Will you answer it, Mrs. O'Toole?"

"Indeed I will answer it! I will answer more than that! I will say that not one drop of hard liquor has gone down this throat in twenty years! I am not a drinking woman, I'll have you understand! You and that rascal of yours!"

"Were you, Mrs. O'Toole, ever arrested on a criminal charge?"

"Your honor," Mr. Yistle interrupted, "I object to this line of questioning. I realize that the esteemed counsel for the defense is attempting to impeach the credibility of this wit-

ness. But I must object to the form his attempted impeachment is taking."

Judge Helman looked mournfully at Mr. Yistle.

"I must overrule your objection, Mr. Yistle. Mr. Hazeltine has remained quite within his legal bounds. You may proceed, Mr. Hazeltine."

Gillian proceeded: "Will the witness answer my last question?"

"Indeed she will!" Mrs. O'Toole cried. "No! I was never arrested on any charge. I am a decent, respectable, law-abiding woman!"

"And on the witness stand just now, you have told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"Oh, so I am a liar now, am I, as well as a drunkard and a criminal?"

"That will be all," said Gillian.

"It had better be all, and it seems to me that a good lawyer like you are could be spendin' his time better than to come into a court room to defend a scamp like that one over there!"

And Maggie O'Toole, to the regret of every one in the court room with the possible exception of the man accused of murder, descended from the witness stand.

THE district attorney was gazing at Gillian with an air of puzzlement. His brows were knitted, and there was a deep furrow between his eyes. Then his air of assurance returned, and he called, in a clear, firm voice, his next witness.

A gorilla of a man came lurching down the aisle and to the witness stand. But Gillian was not watching him; he was watching his client.

Don Robard's bronze complexion had turned gradually yellow. The look of the hunted animal was more and more perceptible in his eyes. The yellow streak, Gillian was certain, was

beginning to reveal itself. The black-mailer would presently realize that he was crowded into a tight corner; that there was but one way of escape.

He whispered anxiously to Gillian: "Do you know if Victor Henshaw is in the court room?"

Gillian answered, with well-simulated surprise: "Why do you want to see Victor Henshaw?"

"I'd like to see him immediately after this session. It—it's an important business matter."

"Henshaw," said Gillian, "is out of the city."

He saw Robard go a shade paler. "How many more witnesses will these devils use?"

"Not many, Don. They seem to have you pretty well surrounded."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Wait."

"Look here! You are in on this frame-up! You're deliberately letting them send me to the chair! You've deliberately helped them get me into this corner! You want to see me electrocuted! Damn you, you helped them—"

"Steady!" warned Gillian.

Don Robard stared at him a moment longer, then subsided.

Gillian watched him. Robard was cracking. It would not be long.

The gorilla-like man had taken the witness stand. He had close set eyes. His blue-black hair came to a peak over his eyes. They were ugly eyes. He gave his name as Nick Whaley.

"Nicholas?"

"I said Nick." This was a growl; it was accompanied by a frown.

Nick Whaley was sworn. His occupation, he said in response to Mr. Yistle's first question, was night watchman. He was in the employ of the Ludlow Salt Works.

"Is it part of your duty, Mr. Whaley, to patrol the old salt dock at the foot of Polk Street?"

Nick Whaley folded his hairy red hands on his stomach and answered: "Yes." He gave Gillian a sultry glance.

Mr. Yistle: "Did you ever know a man by the name of Herman Ochas?"

"Yes; I knew him well."

"Did he not keep a small motor boat tied up beside the old salt dock?"

"He did," answered the gorilla man.

"And did he not make certain use of a small shed, or shanty, on the northeastern corner of the old salt dock?"

"Yes. It was an old tool shed. He used it to store parts of his motor boat when he wasn't using the boat—odds and ends of rope, anchors, and so forth."

"You let him use that shed, did you?"

NICK WHALEY did not answer at once. He finally said: "I didn't stop him from usin' it. Nobody else was usin' it. He patched up the holes in the roof and used it, and nobody stopped him."

"I see. Do you know if Herman Ochas ever stored liquor in that shed?"

"No."

"You mean, he didn't?"

"I mean, I don't know. He stowed stuff in the shed, and he took it away. He was a peaceable guy. He was friendly to me. I knew there wasn't nothin' on the old salt dock for him to steal. He came and went as he pleased. My job was to keep a lookout for fires. Herman Ochas was all right. He used to go my rounds with me sometimes. Night watchin' is a lonely job."

"Do you know if Herman Ochas ever used his motor boat for transporting liquor?"

"I don't know. It was none of my business."

Gillian interjected: "A night watchman might have made it his business."

The gorilla-like man gazed dully at him. "Well, I didn't make it my business."

Mr. Yistle: "Now, Mr. Whaley, I wish you would tell the jury in detail of the events you observed on the old salt dock about midnight on the night of September 16."

Mr. Whaley fixed his sultry gaze on the jury.

"Herman had a feller with him that night—that feller sittin' over there." He flung out a long arm unexpectedly at Don Robard, and the blackmailer stirred uneasily. He was so pale now that Gillian was beginning to wonder if he might not be on the verge of toppling out of his chair. Don Robard was clenching his hands between his knees. His lips were parted upon his fine white teeth, and his eyes were staring. They looked glassy.

Mr. Yistle snapped: "You mean Don Robard?"

"I do. Him and Herman were on the dock when I made my eleven o'clock rounds. Herman was showin' him around the shed, sort of explainin' things to him. I didn't hear what they were sayin'. It wasn't none of my business."

Mr. Yistle interrupted: "Is there a light down on the dock?"

"No; there ain't a light within a block of the dock."

"How did you recognize Herman Ochas and Mr. Robard?"

"I flashed my light on them. I held it on for mebbe ten seconds. Herman says: 'It's all right, Nick. This gentle-

man and I are just discussin' some business.' So I flashed off my light and went on about my own business. I didn't see 'em again until an hour later, when I made my twelve o'clock rounds. At first I didn't see nothin'. I come down Polk Street and onto the inshore end of the dock, right by the shanty there. Then I heard their voices."

"Did you recognize them by their voices?"

"Sure, I did. I knew Herman's voice well, and this man's voice, this Don Robard, has a deep voice like a pipe organ in a movie theater. They were out on the end of the dock. I thought they were gettin' ready to climb down the ladder there into Herman's putt-putt. But they stood there talkin'. I heard Herman say, 'I wish I could make you see it my way, Mr. Robard. I ain't a crook and I ain't a double-crosser and I ain't a liar.' I knew right then that hell was poppin'. I knew that poor old Herman was in trouble. So I started hot-footin' it out to the end of the dock."

The witness paused. Certainly the most important, the most telling, witness so far, he had reduced the court room to a silence in which a man's asthmatic breathing, in the farthest corner, could be loudly heard.

DON ROBARD, gray now with his emotions, was gripping the arms of his chair and straining forward, as if, at another word, he would launch himself at the hairy man on the stand.

Nick Whaley went on:

"Just as I started t'ord the end of the dock, this Robard said, loud and clear: 'You won't double-cross anybody else, you lying sneak!' I didn't see him pull the gun, because it was

so dark. But I saw the red flash of it, and I heard the bang of it. It sounded to me like the roar of a cannon. I started runnin' t'ord him, as I said, just when the gun went off. Next thing I knew, I had tripped up on the loose end of an old plank that had curled up with the heat and rain, and I went smackin' down on my face. It clean knocked the breath out of me. I guess I must o' laid down there, flat on my stomach, for pretty close to half a minute, tryin' to get my wind back. While I was layin' there, I heard a splash in the water, then this feller here, this Robard, came runnin' past me and up Polk Street. I watched him, on my hands and knees, pass under a street light on the corner there of Polk and River. And it was this feller all right. He had plugged Herman, kicked him into the drink, and run."

Nick Whaley paused. Don Robard, with his eyes fixed hypnotically on him, was half out of his chair, gripping the arms until his knuckles were white.

The witness went on: "I walked out to the end of the dock and flashed my light around, but there wasn't no sign of Herman. Then I got nervous. I ran back to the factory and called up the police."

Don Robard sprang to his feet, knocked his chair over and ran around the end of the counsel table. Gillian watched him with alert gray eyes. The moment he had been awaiting had come. Don Robard was cracking!

A sheriff sprang at Robard and grasped him by one arm. Robard struck him savagely in the face, and the sheriff seemed to wilt. Another sheriff leaped upon him, wrapped an arm about his neck and locked the hold with his other hand.

Robard shook his free fist at the man on the witness stand.

"You liar!" he shouted. "You dirty rotten liar!"

Nick Whaley had risen. There was an ugly grin on his lips. He bundled his huge hairy hands into fists at his side and waited. But the sheriff held on. The other one came unsteadily to his feet. Steel glinted. Handcuffs snapped upon the blackmailer's wrists.

The court room was in an uproar. A bailiff banged with his gavel. Gillian had arisen with a faint smile. Mr. Yistle, in a momentary lull, added his climax to the scene:

"Your honor, the State rests."

CHAPTER VII.

DETERMINED MEN.

JUDGE HELMAN had arisen. He banged on his desk and said sternly: "Return the accused to his cell. If order cannot be restored in this court, I will order the room cleared. The defense may proceed."

Gillian stepped up to the bench. "Your honor," he said, "I shall require until to-morrow morning to finish the preparation of my case. It may be necessary for me to summon a witness who is out of the city. Will you permit me to open the defense in the morning?"

"It is granted," ruled Judge Helman. He turned to the jury.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, we are about to take a recess until to-morrow morning at ten o'clock. The Court admonishes you not to speak about this case among yourselves or permit any one to speak to you about it. You will keep your minds open until the case is finally submitted to you."

Mr. Yistle seized Gillian by the arm. The district attorney wore a wide, exultant grin.

"Well, Gil, do you admit you're licked? Can you kick a hole in my case?"

"The holes in your case," Gillian answered, "are big enough for a Zepelin to fly through."

"You mean, you think you can bring in a verdict for that rat after the testimony the jury has heard to-day?"

"That's what I intend to do, Adelbert."

Mr. Yistle threw back his head and laughed. It was loud, irritating laughter. Gillian watched the district attorney's merriment with a faint frown.

Judge Helman leaned over the bench toward them.

"If it's as funny as that," said the mournful judge, "let me in on it."

"It's funny enough, Jerry," chuckled Mr. Yistle. "Gil says he still has a case."

And for the first time to-day, Judge Helman smiled. It was an astonishing smile; it seemed to extend from one judicial ear to the other. The judge asked:

"What's your defense, Gil?"

"Alibi," said Gillian. He walked toward the jail with the laughter of Judge Helman and Mr. Yistle ringing in his ears.

Gillian found Don Robard clutching the bars of his cell door. His head moved from side to side like that of a caged, untamed animal. His lower lip was protruding. He snarled:

"You damned dirty louse, you've got me cooked!"

Gillian looked at him with round, innocent eyes.

"Don," he breathed, as if he were shocked, "aren't you using pretty harsh words?"

"You damned double-crosser! You took my case with the deliberate intention of railroading me to the chair!"

"There isn't any possible way of saving me, and you know it!"

"That," Gillian murmured, "isn't quite true. There is a way of saving you. Give me the name of some decent, reputable citizen with whom you spent the hours from ten to half past twelve on the night of September 16—and you'll be a free man by noon to-morrow."

Don Robard began to curse. He paced up and down in the narrow confines of his cell and he wrung his hands. From time to time he shot a murderous look at Gillian and cursed at him. Gillian stood and watched him with a mild but catlike curiosity. Don Robard was a rat in a trap. Only one man could save him from a hideous interlude which would end with his being strapped in that horrible piece of furniture known as the electric chair. And that man could be reached only through Gillian Hazeltine.

Gillian watched the sweat stream in small rivers down the lemon-colored face of the blackmailer.

DON ROBARD reached the far end of his cell. His step became suddenly uncertain. Gillian watched him sharply. He knew that Robard was on the very verge of collapse. The man pivoted about and came staggering to the door. His mouth was open, and he was breathing through it stertorously. His eyes were wild; they seemed to bulge. He panted:

"You've got me licked! I'll do anything you say! Get Victor Henshaw! I'll make any bargain you say! I'll do anything you tell me! But get Henshaw by to-morrow morning!"

"You spent the evening of September 16 with Victor Henshaw?" said Gillian.

"You know I did! Yes!"

"Blackmailing him for more money—a half interest in the *Times*?"

"Yes, yes. I'll do anything you say. I'll make any promise and I'll keep it! I want to get out of this town! I know you hate me! I know what you'll do to me if I ever come back. Oh, I know you now, Hazeltine! I'll never cross you again."

"No," said Gillian. "You'll never cross me again."

"I'll never return to Greenboro!"

"Never," said Gillian.

"You'll get Henshaw to come to court and testify for me?"

"Yes," said Gillian.

He left the jail and walked to his office. A great load was removed from Gillian's shoulders. For the first time in weeks, he felt happy. Reaching his office in the Atchison Building, Gillian put in a long distance call for the hunting lodge on Lake Carmo where Victor Henshaw was in seclusion.

It was an excited, exultant Henshaw who answered his call.

"Gillian," he cried, "you've done wonders. I've had hourly reports on the trial radioed to me up here, and I want to tell you you've done a masterly job. That last witness, that night watchman, was superb. We've got that snake where we want him—at last!"

"Yes," Gillian agreed, "and he is willing to talk business. When can you leave for Greenboro?"

The newspaper publisher chuckled. "I've changed my mind. I'm not coming."

"You mean," Gillian gasped, "you won't testify for him?"

"That's just what I mean. Damn him, he's made me suffer for fifteen years. He's put white hairs in my head and he's carved lines in my face. You've got him beautifully trapped. Let him go to the chair! To-morrow

morning, you can simply state that you have no defense. Robard will be dead in a month."

Gillian snapped: "You're out of your senses!"

"I am taking a well-earned revenge."

"Victor," Gillian said grimly, "you will catch the first train for Greenboro. You will be here by ten to-morrow morning."

"Try and make me! The only train from here which would reach Greenboro before ten to-morrow morning leaves in one hour. I'm going to miss that train. And I'll bet you a thousand dollars that Judge Helman will not grant you another postponement!"

GILLIAN jammed the receiver down on its hook, got his hat, and raced out of his office. At the curb in front of the Atchison Building he hailed a cruising taxicab; leaped in and directed the driver to break all speed laws to the municipal airport. The taxicab driver started to give Gillian a scornful look, then recognized him; ticked his forefinger to the vizer of his cap and said: "You bet, Mr. Hazeltine!"

At the field office of the airport, Gillian spoke brusquely to a blue-eyed young man.

"I want to charter a two-passenger plane for the night—that is, a plane which will carry two people beside the pilot. I want a pilot who can make a safe landing after dark in a field no larger than a backyard."

"There's a pilot here from the Long Island Curtiss Field," stated the field manager. "He's Randy Enslow. Randy used to barnstorm with Lindbergh in the old days before Slim went into the air mail. Randy could fly a wheelbarrow."

Twenty minutes later, Gillian followed a tall, lean young man with a snub nose and clear gray eyes into the cabin of a yellow monoplane. Its engine roared. Gillian settled himself in an uncomfortable seat and watched the instrument board and the back of Randy Enslow's neck.

Enslow was taxiing the monoplane to the end of the field, ducking his head from side to side. Gillian placed his hands upon his stomach and tried to compose his interior. He had flown only once or twice, and he did not like the sensation.

The motor suddenly roared more loudly than it had before. The ground began skimming along below Gillian's fascinated eyes. Then something else skimmed below Gillian's fascinated eyes—several hangars. He looked down the right wing and his stomach receded within him still more. The wing was pointing straight at the hangars.

The yellow monoplane straightened out of the sharp turn and headed north. Gillian settled back and appreciated the young man in the seat in front of him. A great race of men, these flyers. Took it as casually as he took driving his car.

Darkness fell. Lights sprang into being on the earth below. A moon came up in the east and Gillian fell to thinking of Vee-Anne. He dozed. He awoke, startled. A man was squeezing his foot. The roar of the engine was absent. In its place was a singing of wind.

Enslow's voice: "That the place?"

Gillian looked down. The moon had risen, lost its redness and become a source of silver light. It was shining on a long oval of water. On the far bank was the dark huddle of a house.

Gillian shouted: "Yes! That house. There's a ten-acre wheat field behind it."

The motor roared again. The yellow monoplane climbed. Enslow opened a window and tossed something overboard. It was a parachute flare. The light descended slowly, radiating the wheat field with a pure white glare. The plane began doing things. Its nose went down. Its right wing went up. It went corkscrewing to earth. Lights flashed on under its fuselage—landing lights. A hundred feet above the field, the pilot put the ship into a fast sideslip. Then it straightened. It landed in the field with a bump so slight that Gillian was hardly aware of it.

"Wait," he said to Enslow. "Have you enough fuel to fly back to Greenboro?"

"Plenty," said the pilot.

Gillian started across the field toward the house. Half way there, a figure in pale-gray knickerbockers met him. Henshaw said:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"You're flying back with me," said Gillian grimly. "We're starting at once."

"Gillian, I'm not going to testify for that skunk. That's final."

"You've had a brainstorm," said Gillian. "Snap out of it."

"I've been thinking," the publisher disagreed. "If you let Robard go, sooner or later he'll be back, bleeding me again. Let him die in the chair!"

"That," Gillian snapped, "would be deliberate murder."

"Death is what he deserves."

"Half your life," Gillian said coldly, "you've regretted murdering one man. You may be willing to take another murder upon your conscience—but I won't. I told you, I will not be a party to any murder."

The publisher's shoulders seemed to sag. He said, in a tired voice:

"I've tried all my life to be a square shooter. Since that night in San Francisco, I've never laid my finger on a man in anger. And for fifteen years that reptile has been stabbing me in the back. But I'll go with you, Gillian. I'll testify for him."

CHAPTER VIII.

SURPRISE WITNESS.

DON ROBARD, with furtive, suspicious eyes, stared at Gillian as Gillian made his opening address to the jury.

Mr. Yistle sat back in his chair and watched Gillian with half-lidded eyes of complacency and amusement. He turned presently and whispered to his assistant, Mr. Bullock:

"Now, for some high-powered spellbinding. But it won't get him anywhere. Gillian is licked and he's going to stay licked. We've got him sewed up in a bag, Mr. Bullock!"

"Yes, sir!" affirmed Mr. Bullock, who was an incurable yes-man.

Said Gillian: "... And I will endeavor to prove to you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, that the testimony of apparently reliable eye and ear witnesses is not always to be depended upon. I will endeavor to establish beyond the shadow of a doubt that Don Robard was not within miles of the old salt dock on the night when Herman Ochas came to his death. My first witness will be Charles Murchison."

There was an audible stir in the court room as Charles Murchison, the proprietor of the hot-dog stand on River Street, made his way to the stand. He seated himself and looked at Gillian uneasily.

Gillian said sharply: "Mr. Murchison, yesterday when you took the

stand, you said that at about ten thirty on the night of September 16 Herman Ochas and a man entered your restaurant and ordered coffee and doughnuts."

"Yes, sir."

"You said further that your eyesight is excellent."

"Yes, sir; I said that."

"Mr. Murchison," Gillian said gently, "you don't want to be arrested and sent to jail for perjury, do you?"

Mr. Yistle leaped up and cried: "Objection!"

"Overruled. The defense will proceed. The witness will answer that question."

The man with the toothbrush mustache answered: "No, sir; I don't want to be arrested for perjury."

"Then, Mr. Murchison, wouldn't you like to retract the statement you made yesterday that your eyes are excellent?"

Mr. Murchison looked at Gillian unhappily and said nothing.

"Wouldn't you," Gillian urged him, "like to tell this jury the truth about your eyes. That you are so shortsighted you cannot even read a newspaper without your glasses? Isn't that the truth?"

"Yes, sir; that's the truth."

"Then why did you testify yesterday that your eyes are so good?"

"Because I'm ashamed of them bein' so bad."

Gillian looked at him sternly. "Mr. Murchison, on the night when Herman Ochas and *some man* came into your restaurant, isn't it true that you were *not* wearing your glasses?"

"Yes, sir; it's true. I left my glasses at home that night."

"Then you will admit that you cannot be absolutely certain that the man who entered your restaurant with Her-

man Ochas was this man sitting here?"

"I guess I'll have to admit that, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Wouldn't you like to say, Mr. Murchison, that you are not at all certain that the man who entered the restaurant with Herman Ochas was Don Robard?"

"I guess I'd better be on the safe side and say that I'm not at all certain," agreed the willing witness.

"That will be all," said Gillian.

MR. YISTLE took the witness. He took him in a spirit of indignation and rage. He took Mr. Murchison back and forth across his testimony of yesterday, but the hot-dog stand proprietor became more and more conservative. He became less and less certain that the man with Herman Ochas had been black-haired. He might have been blond. He was sorry. He had only wanted to help the cause of justice.

Finally, in a fine fury, Mr. Yistle dismissed him. He sat down and glared at Gillian, and Gillian gave him a round-eyed, innocent stare in return.

The Court: "Call your next witness."

Gillian's next witness was Maggie O'Toole. The old Irishwoman took the stand very pertly this morning.

"Mrs. O'Toole," Gillian began, "when you took the stand yesterday, isn't it true that you were a little excited, that you may have made certain statements that you would like to retract to-day?"

"I won't say that I would," retorted the Irish lady. "No. I won't say anything of the kind."

"I would like to refresh your memory, Mrs. O'Toole. Isn't it true that on the night of last June 10, and on the

night of last July 12 and on the night of last August 4, you were taken to night court to answer to a drunkenness charge?"

"Well," snapped the Irish lady, "what of it?"

"Isn't it true that on the night of September 16, shortly before you left your work in the Atchison Building, one of the tenants, a stockbroker, working late, gave you a pint flask of rye whisky?"

"He is a perfect gentleman," stated Maggie O'Toole belligerently.

"Isn't it true that, in his presence, you drank practically the entire contents of that pint flask of rye whisky?"

Maggie O'Toole looked at Gillian defiantly. But she said nothing.

"Isn't it true," he persisted, coming closer to her, "that when you walked home from work that night you were seeing double?"

"I never see double!" Maggie shouted. "I may see things blurred, but I never see things double!"

"Very well—blurred. On the night of September 16, as you staggered home from work, you passed two men on River Street. One of them you recognized as Herman Ochas. The other you say you now identify as the accused."

"That's what I said," agreed Maggie, but there was much less assurance in her voice.

"But how can you be so certain that this was the man with Herman Ochas when everything before your eyes was so blurred?"

"I suppose I can't be so certain," Maggie admitted.

"That will be all," said Gillian.

Mr. Yistle's indignation was mounting. His face was now pink. It soon became crimson as he cross-examined Maggie O'Toole. No; she hadn't told

any lies yesterday. No; she didn't realize that she may have perjured herself. No, no, no; she wouldn't swear to-day that the men she saw on River Street that night were Herman Ochas and Don Robard. She wasn't even certain that one of the men was Herman Ochas. Things were pretty blurred that night.

The district attorney ended his cross-examination in a sputtering outburst. He wanted this witness held for perjury.

"Decision reserved," ruled Judge Helman, and to Gillian: "Call your next witness."

GILLIAN'S next witness was the gorilla man. Nick Whaley came lumbering to the stand. His small, close-set eyes seemed to be slightly crossed as they fixed themselves on Gillian.

"Mr. Whaley," Gillian sharply began, "yesterday when you testified, you stated that on your eleven o'clock rounds on the night of September 16, you saw Herman Ochas and another man standing near an old shack or shed or shanty on the old salt dock, engaged in conversation. You said that you flashed your light on them, and that you recognized Herman Ochas and that, since then, you have identified the other man as Don Robard. I want you to answer a question honestly: Since that night, have you ever seen that other man until yesterday, when you pointed him out in court?"

"No, sir; I never saw him in between."

"And you recognized him yesterday as the man who was with Herman Ochas on the night in question."

"I thought I did, sir."

"What do you mean," Mr. Yistle snapped, "you thought you did?"

"Your honor," said Gillian, "the esteemed district attorney for the people may take this witness for cross-examination when I have finished with him."

Mr. Yistle's face had turned alarmingly from pink to cerise. He seemed to have difficulty with his breathing. But he subsided.

Gillian: "But I will repeat Mr. Yistle's question. It is a fair one. What do you mean—you *thought* you did?"

The witness fumbled with his hairy hands.

"I mean that when I got to thinkin' it over, I wasn't so sure. The more I thought about it, the surer I was that the feller I seen with Herman that night was a blond feller, with blue eyes, and this feller here has black hair and brown eyes."

Mr. Yistle expressed his feelings with a snort that was heard distinctly in the farthest corner of the court room.

"And when you returned to the old salt dock on your twelve o'clock rounds," Gillian pursued, "what did you see of Herman Ochas's companion then?"

"I didn't see him. No. I didn't see him at all."

"But, damn it," exclaimed the furious district attorney, "you said yesterday—"

"Silence!" ordered Judge Helman. "You may take this witness for cross-examination at the proper time. Mr. Yistle."

Mr. Yistle subsided, fuming. He went into a conference of heated whisperings with Mr. Bullock, but nothing seemed to come of it.

"Then," Gillian was saying to the witness, "you are not certain that the man who fired the shot that killed Her-

man Ochas was Don Robard. Might there not have been two or three men with him in the darkness at the end of the dock?"

"Yes, sir; there might have been."

"You fell down, didn't you, and were so dazed that you weren't very clear in your mind just what was going on?"

"That's the truth!" exclaimed the gorilla man.

"And you are fairly certain that the man with whom Herman Ochas was talking, on your eleven o'clock rounds, was blond and blue-eyed?"

"Yes, sir; I'm pretty positive about it now."

"That will be all," said Gillian.

And once again Mr. Yistle leaped up, determined to save his burning bridges, and to plug the holes in his dyke. But the witness had become taciturn. No, he wasn't certain of anything. No, he wasn't certain he had seen the murderer running up Polk Street. Yes, he was positive there had been a gang of men at the foot of the dock when the shot was fired. Mr. Yistle gave it up in despair. He muttered references under his breath to perjurers, and Gillian in a clear, ringing voice announced:

"My next witness is Mr. Victor Henshaw."

EVEN Mr. Yistle, steeped in fury and gloom, looked up at that.

Heads turned. Necks craned. There was a spattering of applause. Victor Henshaw was easily the most popular public figure in Greenboro. His newspaper was clean and just and courageous; it stood for decency and right and fairness.

The man who had been responsible for the modernizing of the Greenboro public schools, for numerous public

libraries, for at least two new hospitals and for the splendid city park system, came striding down the aisle.

Victor Henshaw gazed at the judge. Judge Helman gazed at him. Not a spark of recognition was visible in either man's eyes. You would never have suspected that they and certain other prominent citizens of Greenboro met every Thursday night and played dollar limit stud—and had been doing so for years.

Mr. Henshaw took the stand and turned his fierce amber eyes first on Mr. Yistle, then on Gillian. Don Robard he ignored. And the blackmailer glared at him with beseeching eyes.

The publisher of the *Greenboro Times* was sworn. Gillian fired questions at him:

"Where were you, Mr. Henshaw, at ten thirty o'clock on the night of September 16?"

"I was sitting on my veranda, smoking a cigar."

"Did you have a caller?"

"I did."

"Who was this caller?"

"Don Robard."

"You are certain your caller was Don Robard and that the time he arrived was ten thirty?"

"Of course I am certain," was the harsh answer.

"Will you kindly tell the jury what had transpired that evening?"

Victor Henshaw faced the jury.

"Nothing in particular transpired. I had seen Don Robard on the golf course at the country club that afternoon. He had said he wished to drop in late that evening and talk over certain investments. At ten thirty he arrived. We talked until some time after twelve thirty. I should say, between half past twelve and a quarter to one, Don Robard left my house."

"That will be all," said Gillian. The defense rests."

CHAPTER IX.

SCOTCHING A SNAKE.

THE district attorney sat staring at Victor Henshaw. His lips were moving. Sounds came from them. But these sounds were not words. They were emotions. It could almost be said that steam was issuing from Mr. Yistle's open mouth. But he presently took himself in hand and walked to the bench.

"Your honor," he exclaimed, "I smell a rat here. I smell a whole family of rats. I have been made the butt of a cruel, practical joke. I wish to have Charles Murchison, Maggie O'Toole and Nick Whaley arraigned and charged with perjury. I will bring the charges."

"You do not," his honor asked with what seemed to be surprise, "wish to cross-examine Mr. Henshaw?"

"Naturally, I do not!" sputtered the indignant district attorney.

"Mr. Hazeltine," said Judge Helman sharply, "will you step up here, please?"

Gillian complied. Judge Helman fixed him with what could be best described as an oystery look.

"Gillian," he said in a low voice, "why didn't you want that reptile electrocuted? You know damned well he deserved it!"

"I have other plans for him," Gillian answered.

Judge Helman again became a stern member of the judiciary.

"Mr. Yistle, I am afraid I must deny your petition. I can see no reason bringing perjury charges against these witnesses. They are all excused."

The judge now made one of the briefest charges to a jury on record in the archives of any court house. He said:

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, it will not be necessary for you to retire to deliberate upon the testimony you have heard."

"No, your honor," said the foreman.

The clerk of the court went through the ancient formula of the Court of Oyer and Terminer. Standing up with his book, he polled the twelve standing men and women, and the court crier gave back their numbers in echo to their names.

"Gentlemen and ladies of the jury," chanted the clerk, "have you arrived at a verdict for Don Robard?"

"We have."

"How say you?"

The slow, rumbling voice of the foreman: "Not guilty."

Mr. Yistle in a loud voice moved that the verdict be set aside. His petition was curtly denied by the judge.

Don Robard stood up dazedly. But there was no smile on his lips. He was trembling. He was watching Gillian with eyes which were those of a whipped animal.

"I'll say good-by," he said.

"Not yet," said Gillian. "We're going for a little ride."

Victor Henshaw came walking over. He ignored Robard.

"I suppose, Gillian, that you will attend to this reptile."

"He'll never annoy you again," Gillian promised. "You'll never see his face again. Because, if you do, there will be witnesses who won't change their minds so easily. Robard understands that—don't you, Robard?"

"Yes—I understand," said Robard, and in his eyes was still reflected the

terror of the fate he had so narrowly escaped.

"You're through with me, Gillian?" asked Henshaw.

Gillian nodded. And grinned. "Vic, was it a better way out than a tail-spin?"

"Far better," the publisher agreed.

"NOW," said Gillian to Robard, "you're coming with me."

Don Robard looked frightened. He started to protest, then fell into step beside Gillian. Gillian took him around to the rear of the courthouse where his coupé was parked. He told Robard to climb in.

"Where are you taking me?"

"For a little ride."

"You mean—you're going to kill me?"

"Sit down and shut up," said Gillian grimly.

Gillian shut the door and tooled the long, gray coupé through the afternoon traffic and out toward the Riverdale Development. He turned into his own driveway presently and stopped at the side porch steps.

Gillian alighted and said: "Come with me, Robard."

Don Robard obeyed. He followed Gillian into the house. In the living room Gillian found Toro polishing furniture.

"Where is Mrs. Hazeltine?"

"In the garden, sir."

"Come," Gillian growled.

Robard came. He followed Gillian, as a dog follows its master, through the house and out upon the terrace; across the terrace and into a sunken garden which blazed with the autumnal colors of chrysanthemum, snapdragon, and the last dahlias.

Vee-Anne, in a white dress over which she wore a blue apron, was cut-

ting chrysanthemums. She turned about swiftly as the two men came toward her. Her eyes, as she saw Don Robard, narrowed and hardened until they were two narrow strips of emerald.

"So you got him off!" she exclaimed.

Gillian nodded soberly. The speech he had prepared he knew he could not deliver. He had planned to say: "Vee-Anne, here he is—here's your lover. You are free to do what you wish. But I think the two of you had better not stay in Greenboro."

He did not say that; and Gillian would be glad to the day of his death that he did not say that—or anything like it. For Vee-Anne's next words all but rendered Gillian breathless.

"What a pity!" she cried. "If ever a man deserved to be sent to the electric chair, it's this man."

Vee-Anne laid the flowers and the shears on the grass at her feet. She straightened up and placed her hands upon her hips.

"What," she asked, "are you going to do with him?"

"He is leaving Greenboro," said Gillian weakly, still looking dazed. "He is leaving Greenboro at once. And never coming back."

Vee-Anne gazed up into her husband's face searchingly. A tiny groove between her eyes; a slight arching of her brows. She brushed a strand of coppery hair from her white forehead.

"Gillian, what were you up to?"

Gillian pretended not to understand. His eyes became round and innocent. The line between Vee-Anne's eyes deepened.

"You didn't fool me for a moment—not after that trial had started," she went on. "That whole trial was a frame-up. The three witnesses who

testified for the State would lay down their lives for you—or, let's say, lie themselves black in the face for you. Charlie Murchison; who runs that hot-dog stand—you got his son out of the reform school, didn't you?"

"Well, as a matter of fact—" Gillian lamely began.

"And Maggie O'Toole," proceeded the red-haired girl; "you've got job after job for her, in spite of the way the poor old thing drinks. Haven't you? And didn't you intervene one time when she was sentenced to six months in the workhouse?"

"Now, listen, Vee-Anne—" Gillian began again.

"And didn't you save Nick Whaley's brother Jim from a possible ten-year sentence about five years ago when he was mixed up with those silk thieves?"

"Jim Whaley never stole that silk!" Gillian declared.

"Darling, don't try to bluff me. I'm merely saying that those three people would lay down their lives for you. So you primed them beautifully and sent them to poor Bert Yistle as witnesses against Don Robard. But why, Gillian?"

"He was trying to blackmail a friend of mine. In fact, he was blackmailing him."

"Is that why you've been acting so strangely the past few weeks—since Robard was arrested?"

Gillian did not answer. Vee-Anne seemed puzzled.

"Or was it because you had heard rumors about Don Robard and me?"

"Well," Gillian admitted, "I had heard rumors."

"Ugly rumors?"

"Well, yes, they weren't nice rumors. Rumors seldom are."

"And all this time you've been treating me just the same as ever!"

"You see—" Gillian tried to explain. But Vee-Anne stopped him again.

"I was hoping it wouldn't be necessary to explain anything. I knew that, regardless of anything you heard about me and Don Robard or any other man, you would have faith in me. You would know that the only man in the world I could possibly love would be you."

Gillian was beginning to feel a little giddy. After all these weeks of torture—

Vee-Anne was saying: "You heard that I had been to his apartment. You heard many such things. Well, I may as well make a clean breast of everything. After the lesson you've taught him, I don't believe Don Robard will practice blackmail soon again in this community. Gillian, I was on his list, too. I didn't tell you—I didn't want to worry you, but Tom has been writing bad checks again."

Tom was Vee-Anne's half-brother, a scamp

"I covered the checks, but there was trouble, anyway. And Don Robard got wind of it. And he threatened to expose Tom, knowing that any such publicity would be injurious to you—and would be painful for me. I think Tom has learned his lesson. He had a dreadful scare. Well, darling, that's all. No; it isn't quite all. I'm not the only person in this city that Robard had been blackmailing."

"I assure you that this charming community need worry about me no longer," Don Robard said.

Gillian gazed at him with round, innocent eyes.

"Robard," he said slowly, "you

don't know what you're talking about. This community isn't worrying about you. You had better get busy and worry about the community. If you once again put foot in this community, you will undergo an experience which will make what you've been through these past two days seem as charming and delightful as Alice's trip through Wonderland. You will never realize how close you came to the electric chair.

"I am giving you until midnight to-night to get out of town. If you are not out of town by midnight to-night, you will regret it. If you ever return, or if you ever attempt to correspond with any one in this town—I will stamp on you again. And there won't be a wiggle or a squirm left in you."

Don Robard looked at Gillian, and he looked at Vee-Anne. He started to smile, but his lips shook so that he could not smile. He wanted to say something nasty, something crushing; but his courage failed him.

"One more point," Gillian went on. "Wherever you go, if a rumor comes to me that you have spoken to any one about a certain incident in the past of a certain man—I'll reach halfway around the world and bring you back here to suffer for it. Do we understand each other?"

"Yes," gasped Robard.

"Clear out of here!"

Robard departed.

Vee-Anne was looking up at Gillian curiously. She said:

"In the thick of all those ugly rumors, did you for a moment doubt me, Gillian?"

Gillian took her in his arms and kissed her. His experience had taught him that the best answer to such a question is a long, ardent kiss.

THE END.



"Ceiling too low; no Jerries out"

A Pile of Lumber

A little French is a dangerous thing, as Navy flyer Howarth and his fellow airmen learned in a surprising way

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

WITHIN the narrow cell interior of the ramshackle wooden building which was called, out of courtesy only, the officers' quarters, there was utter silence, broken only by the tinny sound of water dripping from the leaking roof into a dozen or more receptacles placed upon beds, chairs and floor.

Seated or lying on the narrow cots set in long, even rows against the walls, a half-score young naval aviators read, smoked and dozed. All of them were coatless and shoeless and were wrapped to the neck in damp blankets in a futile

effort to keep themselves warm and dry.

"Any luck?" asked one, turning listlessly to three sodden figures who had just entered.

"No."

"See any Jerries?"

"No." One of the pilots who had just returned from patrol pulled off a shoe and poured half a cupful of muddy water into one of the catch basins. "Ceiling too low. No Jerries out."

The occupants of the room lapsed into melancholy silence. The three soaked pilots leaped into their beds and

pulled the blankets about them, cursing sullenly.

The door was opened and the commanding officer's yeoman blew in on a gust of cold rain. He surveyed the silent officers with an exasperating grin and, secure in his position of influence, lit a cigarette. Then he chanted:

"Commander Macklyn's compliments and will all the flying officers kindly come to his office." Relaxing his official demeanor with a sigh of relief, he added: "Better snap into it, too. The skipper's feeling just a mite peckish this morning."

Dodging a hurtling shoe with practiced dexterity, he withdrew in good order, leaving the door wide open. Groaning, the ensigns and lieutenants, junior grade, pushed damp socks into wet shoes, slipped on soggy forestry green blouses, climbed into slickers and filed out into the rain.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER MACKLYN, U. S. N., was in a mood scarcely more cheerful than that of the little group of pilots who stood about his desk. His lean-jawed chin protruded ominously, and there was a glint to his steel gray eyes that the flyers noted without pleasure. At the end of an overlong silence, he addressed himself to the assembly.

"Gentlemen, ever since we were all ordered down here from the Naval Air Station at Souilly-sur-mer, you've been acting like a lot of silly, sulking school-girls. You've got to cut it out. I don't like this station any better than you do. I know the roof of your quarters leaks. I know there isn't a stove there to warm you. I know that the ships the army turned over to us are worn out, fit only for the junk pile. Nevertheless, it's war and you've got to live here and fight here.

"I'm going to try to repair your quarters. I've already put in for new ships. But in the meantime, you've got just one job in the world. You've been told to keep the air clear of Germans, but von Hoffman has been making you look like truck drivers. Don't tell me his Fokkers are better than your Spads; I know it. But you've got to keep him out of our territory while the army is staging its big push to the south.

"There'll be no more flying to-day. Those of you who have no station duties may have liberty until morning. If the weather breaks I shall expect you to report back here immediately. And to-morrow I shall expect you to cut out all this bellyaching and sulking and get into the game. That's all."

They turned away and filed out of the room like schoolboys, each a little ashamed in the knowledge that Macklyn had treated them more tenderly than they had reason to expect.

"Just a minute, Mr. Howarth." The commander's voice recalled one flyer to his desk.

"You speak French, don't you?" asked Macklyn, when the others had left.

"No, sir. That is, just a little."

"I've heard that you talk for the other officers when you go out together."

"I can just make myself understood, sir."

Macklyn reflected briefly.

"Our liaison officer has gone up to Souilly with the executive and supply officers and will be gone three or four days. But that leaking roof cannot wait until they return. Do you know the Café d'Or at Berange?"

Howarth did know the Café d'Or. So did every other officer who had ever been stationed at this field. It was the

one bright spot in an otherwise hellish sector. Eight kilometers to the rear of the airdrome, it was a little village hotel, possessing clean rooms, marvelous feather beds, an excellent cook who fabricated omelettes of an unsurpassed lightness and a wine cellar from which the *patron* produced cobwebbed bottles of Moët and Chandon champagne at twelve francs fifty each. It was there that the officers spent their pay, reveling in the warmth of its big porcelain stove and in the food and liquor which made life a trifle less unendurable.

"For some unknown reason," continued Macklyn, "the *patron* of that little hotel has a lumber yard which he has cherished and preserved intact through all these years of war. We need it for our repairs. I've had our supply officer estimate the number of board feet in the pile and put through an emergency requisition for it. The *patron* will undoubtedly rook us, but I wish you'd see him and find out if we can buy it for eleven hundred dollars or less. If you can, we'll give him the requisition and send a truck for it right away. That's all."

"I SUPPOSE I ought to go out and at least look at that damned lumber pile," observed Ensign Howarth, reluctantly, beckoning to the *patron* for another bottle of cognac.

Hoots of derision from his fellows greeted this feeble display of ambition. Outside, the rain had settled down to a steady downpour which rattled at the windows like water squirted from a garden hose. Within the café, eight young naval aviators were dry and warm for the first time in many long, disheartening days.

"What for?" demanded Ensign Williams. "You know the lumber is there, and you know what the skipper

will pay for it. He didn't detail you to count the knot holes, did he?"

The others nodded in agreement. Howarth's twinges of conscience were easily assuaged. He watched the over-stout, over-florid *patron* deftly remove the cork from a dusty bottle, while he searched his mind for the correct phrases with which to begin the haggling.

"There is, M. Leboeuf," he began in halting French, "a pile of woods in back of your hotel—"

"Pardon, m'sieur?" The *patron* lifted eyebrows, shoulders, and palms in an eloquent gesture. "A forest, behind the Café d'Or? But no, m'sieur. Not in these hundred years."

Howarth was some moments translating this. Then, patiently, he tried to explain.

"Not woods, monsieur, wood. Lots of wood. A big—" The word "pile" had escaped him. He rose and made gestures, imitative, he fancied, of a lumber pile. The *patron* looked slightly alarmed.

"Better level out," suggested Ensign Williams. "Your left wing's low."

"Left wing low?" came Ensign Feasley's sarcastic voice. "Hell, the bird's in a flat spin!"

"You guys give me a pain in the neck!" retorted Howarth. He grasped the bewildered *patron* by the arm and escorted him out of the room.

The others, now warmed to a pleasant glow, devoted themselves to their liquor, and to a critical discussion of the war, particularly as conducted by their absent hosts, the United States army.

"It's a lousy war!" declared Ensign Williams, at last. "Rotten old crates to fight brand-new Fokkers, cold, wet quarters, and a bunch of smug-faced army officers to yell that we're yellow.

In the next war, I'm going to join the Y. M. C. A."

Ensign Howarth entered the room, followed by the beaming and rubicund M. Leboeuf.

"It's all fixed up," the flyer announced proudly. "Just as soon as we got away from you wise-crackers, I had no trouble at all. He's closer than the skin on an onion, and held out for the full amount, but I got the lumber at last. I'll dash back to the station and tell the C. O. it's fixed. Somebody order me a drink. I'll be back in a few minutes."

As he reached for the knob, he was nearly knocked over by the sudden opening of the door from outside. A wet, discouraged figure blew in on the rain-ridden wind, a French soldier in a shapeless gray-green corduroy tunic, horizon blue knickers and black spiral puttees above brogans that squished audibly as he made his way toward the stove.

"A thousand pardons," he said to the remaining aviators in broken English as Howarth departed. "The wind and the rain, it is terrible. I shiver. By the long gray beard of my sacred aunt, I thirst! *Patron, du vin rouge.*"

The landlord brought his compatriot a glass of red wine. The flyers watched, intrigued, as the *poilu* drained it and removed the last drop of the beverage from his walrus-shaped mustache with a swift manipulation of tongue and lower lip. Then, refreshed, the soldier turned to the landlord and engaged him in rapid-fire conversation which was unintelligible to the others.

ENSIGN WILLIAMS gradually became aware that the *poilu* was looking at the little group of Yanks with profound amazement while listening to the *patron*, whose machine

gun French was tinged with an obvious note of excitement. At last the still-dripping soldier advanced diffidently and addressed himself to Williams.

"Pardon, my lieutenant," he bowed, "but the *patron* desires to know if you are going to furnish your own waiters or if you wish him to remain in your service? He desires me to tell you that the matter of wages is a thing of small moment. The so-brave Americans are always too generous."

The naval aviators regarded the Frenchman with surprise.

"What have we to do with his staying or leaving?" demanded Williams, blankly.

"Is it, then, the just-departed lieutenant who is to be the new *patron*?"

"Howarth the *patron*?" echoed Williams, turning to the soldier. "Of course not! What's all this about, anyway?"

The two Frenchmen went into a huddle which lasted for some time. At length the soldier emerged.

"Perhaps the lieutenants do not know," he confided, "that their comrade has just purchased the Café d'Or. M. Leboeuf does not know his purpose in so doing, but it is now the property of the lieutenant who has so recently departed in the rain. M. Leboeuf would know whether his services will be required."

The flyers received this news in stunned amazement. Feasley opened his mouth to speak, but started violently and lapsed into silence as Williams's generously shod foot bounced off his shin.

"If you, my comrade," said Williams, beaming upon the soldier, "will assist the *patron* in searching the bins for the choicest dozen bottles of champagne, you may each have a bottle for yourselves."

The Frenchmen disappeared instantly. Williams turned to his companions.

"If there is no bill for the champagne, then no one in the world can shake my belief in Santa Claus!"

"I don't understand it yet," expostulated Feasley, tenderly massaging a bruise just above his instep. "Do you mean to tell me that Howarth bought the whole place just to get the lumber?"

The unmistakable noise of the station Ford seeped into the room. They heard it shudder to a stop outside the door. The heavier rumble of the supply truck followed as it turned into the alley which led to the rear of the hotel. Howarth entered, sighing gratefully as he slipped off his glistening raincoat.

"Well," he announced, "the skipper was tickled to death. A dozen gobs came in the truck just behind me. If we have any luck, there won't be any leaks in the roof to-night."

The others sat silent, each waiting for the other to break the news. M. Leboeuf and the stray soldier returned, laden with bottles, which they stacked upon a near-by table. While the *poilu* dashed for some glasses, the *patron* began to open the champagne with fitting reverence.

Howarth's blue eyes opened wide as he resumed his seat at the table and watched the sparkling vintage bubbling in his glass.

"What is this," he demanded, "somebody's birthday?"

"Sure," agreed Williams, blithely. "Santa Claus's birthday." Then, after a moment's thought, he turned and asked, guilelessly: "Listen, Howarth, do you suppose the skipper would allow us to live here at this hotel instead of at quarters?"

"If he thought we would fly and fight any better, he'd let us live any-

where we liked, I guess," replied the other, positively.

"I THOUGHT it might be a good idea if we established sort of an officers' club here," pursued Williams, tentatively.

"Great idea," approved Howarth, "but where would we get the money? We aren't all millionaires, you know."

"Well, it's all arranged, if we can get the C. O.'s permission to live here." Williams winked at his admiring comrades. "What's more, it won't cost us a single franc, either, for a long time. We'll get our lodging and liquor free. Of course we'll have to put out for the food, but that won't be much."

"Let me feel your pulse!" demanded Howarth suspiciously.

"Did the commander issue the requisition for the lumber?" put in Feasley, with an eye to the practical.

"I suppose the C. P. O. in charge of the truck brought it along with him," replied Howarth. "I don't imagine Leboeuf would let them take away a sliver without it."

"It's all right, then," sighed Williams, contentedly. "We own this joint from the last liquor bottle in the cellar to the last feather bed under the eaves. Pretty soft, pretty soft! I hope the war lasts a thousand years!"

"You're having a rush of words," said Howarth. "What's all the mystery about?"

"Why, you poor sap," chuckled Feasley, "your magnificent command of the French language talked us into a whole hotel instead of only a lumber pile. To-night, in my evening prayers, I'll offer up a hymn of thanksgiving for the way you sling the lingo and, at the same time, pray that you never learn any more French than you know."

now. You ought to do a lot for us if we let you do all the talking!"

"Well, if I did buy the whole place, which I'm not prepared to admit," countered Howarth, his ears as red as his hair, "it belongs to the United States navy, doesn't it?"

"What would the navy do with a public house?" chuckled Williams. "Can you imagine sending an inventory of the wine cellars to Josephus Daniels, the guy who abolished the wine mess on all ships and stations?"

"Sure," agreed Feasley, "and wouldn't the skipper laugh off buying a whole hotel just to get a lumber pile?"

"If they ever found it out at Washington, they'd dock his pay for the full amount and he'd have to serve two or three extra wars to work it off."

Howarth, more than a little dazed, drained two glasses of vintage champagne in quick succession. As the room began to rock slightly before his eyes, all his objections seemed to float away in a pleasant pink haze. With the third glass, he became very proud of himself; and just as they were putting him to bed he was heard to state belligerently that he had had the whole thing in mind all along.

IT was really not such a lousy war after all. Of course, the ancient French crates used by the naval aviators still quivered and shook in every wire and strut whenever they careened off the ground for their daily patrols. It still rained five days out of seven. The airdrome was still a vast lake in which one's boots made curious sucking noises when one waded through the mud. Despite the temporary repairs made to the barracks, they were still leaky and would probably always be so, even to the end of

the war. Von Hoffman's *jagdstaffel* still cavorted merrily over the lines, making life a thing of sorrows and gloom unalloyed for Lieutenant-Commander Dick Macklyn, U. S. N.

But in the Café d'Or, at Berange, the junior officers of the station found life most endurable. The feather beds were of an amazing softness; the wine bins were seemingly inexhaustible. Mme. Leboeuf, who had been retained as cook at a surprisingly modest salary, made magic in the kitchen. And, above all, the warm, comfortable public room was a sanctuary from the cold rain and from the dull routine of war.

It had not been difficult to secure the commanding officer's permission for the officers to make use of the Café d'Or as a combination officers' club and sleeping quarters, although he himself declined to accept their proffered hospitality. Macklyn was anxious to do whatever he might to make life more pleasant for the flyers, in the hope that their morale might be restored to normal, with a consequent improvement in their fighting.

Rumors had, of course, reached his ears that the officers had bought the hotel. But he dismissed the subject, believing that the rumor was unfounded, or that two or three of the flyers whom he knew to be wealthy had clubbed together and purchased or leased the place.

He believed in letting well enough alone, and feared that if he looked too closely into things, he might discover something which he would have to put a stop to.

Meanwhile, with every break in the weather, patrols went out as usual. Always they were harried by von Hoffman and his *jagdstaffel* of new Fokkers who could out-climb, out-dive

and out-maneuver the decrepit Spads flown by the Yanks.

"If it were not for this café, I'd lose my mind!" declared Howarth, flinging his helmet to the floor and ordering a cointreau. Williams, who had flown patrol with him, opened a bottle of cognac in moody silence.

"What's the matter?" asked one of a quartet seated about a poker table. "The skipper give you the bird?"

"He didn't have to," replied Howarth disgustedly. "Von Hoffman did it for him. Williams, Feasley, and I got jumped by five Fokkers a couple of kilometers south of Issy, and had a hell of a time getting back at all. Imagine that, will you—five new Fokkers against three spavined Spads!"

"Yes," added Williams morosely, "and it was at the tag end of our patrol, too. They ran us almost out of gas while we were playing blind man's buff with them. Lambert, Mitchell, and Avery are up now, trying to chase them off; but by the time they make their altitude the Fritzies will have accomplished their mission and will be back at their airdromes. We might as well stand on our tarmac and throw stones up at them."

"Well, drink your liquor and forget it," advised a voice from the table. "It 'll be a long war and our turn will come when we get good boats. Meantime we're doing the best we can. We'll have dinner in a couple of hours. Madame has some pullets in the oven that will ease your mind of its burdens."

"Just think how much better off we are in this nice, comfortable hotel than we would be even at Souilly-sur-mer! Good meals, plenty of liquor, feather beds that billow up all around you—oh, boy! Why worry when war is like this? I hope it lasts a lifetime!"

"It will," growled a cynical poker addict.

HOWARTH was not listening. His strained, silent attitude caught the attention of the others, who ceased talking and listened. Pervading the quiet of the room was an almost inaudible purr, a steady, droning sound as of motor traffic on a far-away highway.

"Jerry planes!" exclaimed Howarth, rising and running to the door. The others left their cards and their drinks, crowding out into the narrow street, gazing into the sky in the direction whence came the familiar noise of the Mercedes engines.

Over the spire of the village church they could see a cluster of cottony puff balls of anti-aircraft shells. The grunting cough of the exploding Archie came to their listening ears. Amid the shrapnel puffs they distinguished eight tiny black dots, which grew larger and larger as they watched.

"Come on," snapped Howarth; "let's get back to the field and get busy. It's pretty raw, their coming over this far. The skipper will have a fit!"

They dashed into the hotel, gathered up their flying equipment, and in less than two minutes were scrambling into the station car. But even as the overloaded Ford, with flyers jamming the tonneau and clinging precariously to the running board, shimmied into motion, the raiding German squadron was over the peaceful little hamlet.

From behind the church came a terrific explosion. A mighty geyser of black smoke appeared behind the lofty ridge-pole. The spire, which had stood there when Jeanne d'Arc passed through the village at the head of her army, leaned tipsily to one side and toppled to the ground.

The air was full of strange, whirring whines, which, mingled with the rumbling roar of falling masonry and the all-pervading snore of the Mercedes engines, changed the accustomed pastoral quiet of the sleepy village into a very maelstrom of noise.

The Ford was scarcely fifty feet from the door of the Café d'Or when the street behind it vomited flame, smoke, and dust. Amid the smoke, those who looked back could see the loosened tiles of the hotel roof slip down the sloping surface in a landslide, filling the center of the narrow street with a dusty litter of débris. Simultaneously, it seemed, a huge hole appeared in the naked timber exposed by the missing tiles.

From the upper story window a sheet of flame joined that which belched from the shattered roof. As they watched, the entire building was blotted from their sight by a fountain of crimson-flecked smoke.

The Ford careened around the corner, veering and skidding precariously as Howarth steered his way between panic-stricken inhabitants of the village, who ran from one side of the cobble-stoned street to the other, blindly, aimlessly.

Over the tops of the gabled stone buildings could be seen a great black smoke pall, drifting down from the direction of the hotel and the church. The steady roar of the raiders' engines was fading away in the distance. As the last house of the village was left behind, Howarth opened the throttle, and the Ford leaped and bounced over the rough military highway.

"I had two hundred dollars' worth of kit back there in my room!" exclaimed Williams, gazing back at the smoke which now lay over the village like a suffocating blanket.

"My dress blue uniform was hanging over the back of a chair," moaned Feasley.

"Do you realize that we hadn't used up one-third of the liquor in that cellar?" demanded Howarth, staring straight ahead along the road.

"Yes, and now we'll have to sleep in those damned wet barracks again," added Williams dismally.

A kilometer down the road they met a messenger from the station who, from his uncomfortable perch on a careening motorcycle, waved to them frantically.

"A summons from the skipper," observed Feasley.

"The hell with him!" snapped Howarth.

THE rest of the trip was made in utter silence, except for the hideous uproar of the ancient Ford, which banged its springs against the rear axle and threatened to shed all four trembling mudguards at once.

The six naval aviators bounced from side to side, but appeared not to notice, for their eyes were set stonily ahead. They whirled into the station gate, splashing a cataract of muddy water upon an astonished sentry, who had no time to conceal a half-smoked cigarette before the car was halfway across the flying field.

The gob muttered an appropriate epithet and retired to the sentry box to meditate upon the insanity so apparent among all flyers.

Commander Macklyn, hearing the Ford's wheezing, roaring motor, hastened to the window of his administration shack, just in time to see the officers spill out of the car and race into the hangar.

Observing the instant activity of the mechanics, he stepped to the door.

Then, changing his mind, he resumed his post at the window, watching the busy scene with a thoughtful expression in his level gray eyes.

"Either that messenger broke the record between here and Berange," he said to himself, "or something's got those birds all stirred up."

"A Spad rolled out of the hangar under its own power, raced down the field with its tail up, flipped around and roared up-wind, taking off with a zoom that curdled Macklyn's blood. Another plane taxied out of the sagging shed, and another. As the amazed commander stood there, four pursuit planes and a two-seater leaped into the air, stripping the station of every ship that would fly, with the exception of the three which were still out on patrol.

Macklyn stood at the window until all five planes had disappeared. Then he walked over to his desk, lighted a Maryland, and smoked it to the very end before he turned to the paper work which must be attended to before night. The first three letters concerned von Hoffman; and they were not pleasant reading.

FIVE kilometers west of Berange, Howarth, who was leading the - - five-ship formation, observed three planes in the distance ahead. Spads, they were, apparently on their way back to the Naval Air Station. As he had expected, it was Lambert, Mitchell, and Avery, returning after a brush with a squadron of raiding German aviators in which, badly outnumbered, they had been fortunate to escape alive.

The leading plane was spitting smoke and gradually losing altitude. Engine trouble. Howarth swung close beside them, waving and pointing

ahead, toward the direction the Germans had taken.

Two of the three immediately banked over and joined the outbound patrol. The third, Lambert, shook his head, pointed at the missing engine, and continued on his lonely way.

Howarth straightened away on his course. Six against eight. That was better. He glanced backward over his shoulder. The others were drifting into a compact little V, the two-seater in the middle, just behind the leader. The Naval Air Station was lost in the mist astern; the town of Berange, where there had once been comfort and good cheer, too far off to the left to be visible.

Howarth was glad that he could not see what was left of the Café d'Or. He stared straight ahead through the shimmering arc of his propeller. There, just over to the left, was a cluster of Archie bursts.

Over Allied territory, that could mean but one thing. German planes. Probably raiders, bombing other comfortable places where soldiers foregathered to be sheltered from the rain and the muck and the general hellishness of everything in this hag-ridden land.

Howarth wiggled his wings in signal and swung toward the left, at the same time nosing up for increased altitude. He was glad that they were flying Spads, even old ones. A Tellier boat could never climb like these little pursuit planes, nor like the two-seater in their midst, which was climbing as valiantly as the rest. Good old crate! You needed a land ship to go out after a lousy gang of Jerries who had nothing more worthwhile to do than to smack down peaceful hamlets and harmless hotels.

Yes, it was the same raiding squad-

ron, bound home after a successful foray. Howarth's eyes glinted as he saw them swing to intercept the smaller Yank formation; always willing to take on odds of eight to six, or better! The Spads had the advantage of altitude and were climbing fast to hold it. Howarth fired a burst from his Lewis gun to warm up the cosmoline. His heart warmed to it as it answered the pressure of his fingers with a vicious, stuttering bark.

At three thousand five hundred meters they began to scrape the bottom of the ceiling, skimming through a fine moisture-laden mist that bit into their clothing with clammy, penetrating teeth.

It would rain soon, and there would be no Café d'Or to return to. There would be only the damp, leaking barracks where one heard the continual *clank, clank* of raindrops dripping from the ceiling into the tin wash-basins on the floor. The red-headed leader looked at the Germans through a pink haze of anger.

Five hundred meters below, the enemy was climbing. Von Hoffman's squadron clung together for offense or defense. They flew as if with one mind, precise and swift in every movement.

Now! Howarth signaled the attack and nosed down in a full power dive, his five comrades following him as though attached to his stern by an invisible tow rope. Down, down, straight at the Jerries who now circled, preparing for the attack. The ensign smiled grimly as his tiny ship screamed down at an incredible speed, every taut wire shrieking in protest, the engine's thundering beat changing to a high-pitched wail whose overtones made his ear-drums ache. In a Tellier boat, he'd never have dared to dive like that;

she'd have shed her wings, and he'd have lost the chance to get even with those confounded inn-wrecking Jerries down there. Ah!

THE plunging Yanks split the German formation asunder as a steel wedge slices through rotten wood. Not a Spad lost position as they drove down through the ranks of the enemy. The Fokkers darted this way and that to escape certain death by collision. For a moment, there was confusion in the German squadron. Never before had the Americans opened battle with such colossal disregard of odds. Was it, perhaps, a new pursuit group? Or an older, more experienced squadron imported for the occasion?

Two hundred meters below the scattered Fokkers, Howarth pulled out of his dive and led his avenging comrades back into the fight. From the outer group of Germans, a plane with zigzag camouflage on its blunt nose, dropped like a projectile toward the American leader, his Spanda spitting knifelike crimson flashes. But from somewhere behind Howarth, two dotted lines of sulphurous gray tracer smoke converged in the path of the diving Jerry. As though drawn by a magnet, the Fokker swept through those ruler-straight lines, veered slightly in its downward course and disappeared from sight, the pilot's head drooping wearily against the tiny windscreen. Howarth looked angrily over his shoulder. Who had robbed him of his kill?

The air above him seemed black with diving planes, all of which seemed heading straight for him. One of them was sure to get him. The hell with them! He gritted his teeth and kicked hard right rudder to meet the first, who was following a stream of tracer that issued from his bow.

Howarth was conscious of a grim, deadly calm as he Immelmanned to escape the deadly probing of that innocent-looking gray line. Sagging down on his shoulder harness at the top of the turn, he gazed down upon the attacker who had swept down past him. There was a checkerboard design painted on wings, tail and fuselage. So that was the famous von Hoffman, eh? The great von Hoffman who, not content with making life miserable for the naval aviators these many weeks, had just bombed them out of house and home! He was no longer just another Jerry, a little better than the rest. He was a personal enemy who had gone out of his way to play the Yanks a shabby trick.

Howarth nearly pulled his joystick out by the roots as he tried to swing over and get that checkerboard in his right sight. There, by thunder. No. Missed by a hair!

The fight ceased to be a squadron affair. Everything else was blotted from Howarth's consciousness except von Hoffman and himself. Other planes blundered into his path. He cursed them as he missed locking wings by fractions of an inch.

A plane flashed by him, scarcely a dozen feet to the left. He felt a blast of hot air on his cheek and his Spad bucked violently. The falling plane was a roaring mass of flames. Blazing bits followed it down, amid a stiff ribbon of viscous black smoke. Howarth scarcely noticed it, beyond mechanically noting Maltese crosses painted on wings and tail. His business was with von Hoffman, the source of all his troubles. Until von Hoffman was bumped off, neither he, nor any other Yank, would have an instant's peace.

Over, around, slip, barrel-roll, Immelmann, split-arc. First he was on

the German's tail, then von Hoffman was on his. Time stood still; the passing of seconds between maneuvers seemed to drag out into hours. Would this damned ring-around-the-rosy never be over so they could go home? Home, to a rain-soaked barracks where one was never warm!

Ah, that was better! The bow of the checkerboard plane suddenly swam straight into his ring sight, not fifty feet away. As his fingers automatically squeezed the trigger, he saw the whole length of the Fokker slide across the tiny circle. He watched his own tracer line sweep slowly along the entire length of the checkerboard, from bow to flippers. Then, as his Spad began to slip off on one wing, he kicked the rudder desperately and swung his tracer halfway back along the enemy hull before his bow snapped down and he had to fight his way out of the beginning of a spin.

BACK at him, now. He straightened out, swung around and looked for von Hoffman. The Fokker was not where it should have been. Irritated, Howarth scanned the skies, his eye flicking over the other planes which dashed hither and thither, but taking in no detail, since his mind was focussed only upon one man and one plane.

He looked down. There! Yes, there was the checkerboard, three hundred meters below him. Howarth shook his head to clear his tired mind and looked again. The Fokker's bow was down, her tail up. Flippers, stabilizer and rudder were swinging around and around as the German whirled down in a loose spin. Howarth followed him down for five hundred meters before he came to a full realization that von Hoffman was through in this world.

Well, that was that. Where were the others? Trembling a little, he looked about him. Half a dozen kilometers to the eastward, tiny dots of planes darted this way and that, climbing, diving, zigzagging as though piloted by crazy men. Even as Howarth slapped on full throttle and headed toward the dog-fight, he saw two of those dots seem to merge and, together, start downward on their long fall toward the ground.

Then, suddenly, the character of the fight changed. A single plane broke away from the *mêlée* and headed eastward. Two others raced after it, diving and zooming, but slowly being left astern. Behind them, two more abandoned the fight, also heading eastward. The whole thing seemed, to Howarth, to be inextricably confused. He could not tell who were trying to escape, Germans or Americans.

But those ahead drew away fast. That was the answer, for the Fokkers had the superior speed. Little by little they gained. Howarth sat on the edge of his bucket seat, as though he could spur his ship on to greater speed by so doing.

Now he was able to count the planes that were streaking eastward. Up ahead, one, two, three, four! He counted them again. Only four Fokkers? That meant four down! But what about his own comrades? One, two—five, plus himself! Once again he counted both groups. He had been right. Four to six. The Yanks had not lost a ship!

The Spads up ahead suddenly banked over and cut a long slanting course toward the south. By steering obliquely across their line of flight, Howarth was able to catch up with them just as the foremost nosed downward in a long, swinging spiral. He looked over the

cockpit edge and discovered, with a start of surprise, that they were over their own airdrome.

ONE after another, the planes dropped their wheels into water that splashed in great waves on each side. The flyers clambered out, stiffly, scarcely speaking to the mechanics who raced through the mud to meet them.

Howarth's feet made sucking sounds as he walked away from his bullet-riddled Spad. The other flyers were standing about, shivering in the wet, misty wind. Far across the lake of surface water, Commander Macklyn stood on his tiny porch, watching them.

"I had three pairs of nice dry shoes back at the *Café d'Or*," Howarth groaned to Feasley.

"That's nothing," retorted Williams, joining them. "I tell you, there were still five bins of damn good liquor left!"

"Three of the bins were filled with champagne!" added another, his voice hoarse with regret.

The rain closed in, beating across the field in long, slanting sheets like a wind-blown curtain. Mechanics made haste to taxi the Spads into the hangar.

"Tell you what let's do," suggested Howarth hopefully. "The station Ford is still here. Let's jump into it and drive to Berange and see if we can dig any of our stuff out of the ruins of the hotel."

"Might as well," agreed Williams, half-heartedly, endeavoring to subdue the chattering of his teeth. "Maybe I could dig my kit out. It cost me two hundred berries."

The Ford shuddered into life, making the air reverberate with its clatter as it bounced through the main gate and down the rough cobblestones toward the village.

Just over the gaunt skeleton of the ruined church a streamer of smoke floated downward in the heavy air.

"Guess the hotel must still be burning," observed Williams, who was squeezed between Howarth and Feasley on the front seat.

There was no answer. The flyers, too dispirited to speak, gazed dully at the familiar scenes, where the French still stood about, huddled close against the buildings for shelter from the rain. As the Ford swung around the corner opposite the hotel, Howarth uttered a wild yell.

"Look! It's still standing!"

And standing it was, although not quite as it had been before the raid. The roof beams were exposed to the weather. Some of them had disappeared entirely, giving a raffish appearance to the dignified old structure, not unlike that of a drunken man who has lost his hat.

Howarth skidded to a stop at the brink of a crater which had been blown in the street directly before the entrance. The others gazed at the hole with awed respect. Within its capacious interior, a Liberty truck and a litter of Whippet tanks might have been buried with ease.

THE flyers leaped hastily from the car and, without pausing, dashed into the building. Dust was everywhere. The acrid smell of high explosive stung their nostrils, but they paid no attention. They burst breathlessly into the tap room, hopeful, yet prepared for the worst.

Except for the dust, the comfortable room was as before, even to the gently glowing stove in the corner. Mme. Leboeuf, busily dusting off the tables, looked up at the officers, who stood in

an incredulous, amazed group at the door.

From the office appeared M. Leboeuf and the stray *poilu*, who seemed always about. Upon seeing the pilots, the volunteer interpreter hid a bottle behind his back and bowed.

"Ah, *messieurs*," he exclaimed, "but you are lucky, to have so escaped damage from the *sales Boches*; The top floor, it is ruined, but that is of little account. Three-four hundred francs will mend it. That is nothing to rich Americans."

"Is the rest of the hotel undamaged?" demanded Howarth, still incredulous.

"Except for the dust, yes, my lieutenant."

"If you and the *patron*," said Feasley, shedding his coat and walking over to the grateful heat of the stove, "will find six bottles of Moet and Chandon, you may each have a bottle for yourselves." He turned slowly to the others, who, with vast sighs of contentment, were removing wet outergarments and making themselves comfortable. "Let's get the *madame* to roast three whole chickens and have a great meal to celebrate."

"Suits me," beamed Howarth. "Personally, I hope the war lasts another five years and that we stay right in this one place till peace is declared."

There came the sound of a popping motor cycle. Amid a cold blast of wet wind, the commanding officer's messenger blew in. He stood for a moment, facing the officers.

"Commanding officer's compliments," he chanted, "and will all officers kindly report to the station in ten minutes with their full equipment. We're shoving off toot sweet for Souilly-sur-mer."

THE END.



The automatic seemed like a toy as he fired it at the giant

Princess of the Atom

Sequel to "The Girl in the Golden Atom"

Frank Ferrule ventures into a Lilliputian universe, the mysterious world inside a piece of meteoric rock

By RAY CUMMINGS

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FRANK FERRULE, who is telling the story, and his brother Drake had a foster sister, Dianne, whom their father had found as a baby on Bird's Nest Island, off the shore of their Maine summer home. One day on Bird's Nest Island, she disappeared, vanished into nothingness. Nor did they hear anything more of her, until the days when the giants came.

Ships off the Maine coast reported

giants, fifty or a hundred feet tall, stalking along in the water; and one was seen to vanish near Bird's Nest Island. Then one day a seeming human, who somehow aroused the sensation of something evil, came to the Ferrules in New York and mentioning Dianne's disappearance, warned them not to go near their Maine home.

Immediately they guessed that she was trying to reach them there. Hunt-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 14.

ing for her on the island, Drake and Frank see little creatures in the grass. Two of these grow before their eyes to human size. They are Dianne and another girl named Ahlma. Hurrying back to the Ferrule cottage, they tell Mr. Ferrule their plan. Dianne, it develops, is the princess of the tiny world, a counterpart of our own, in an atom on Bird's Nest Island. The scientists of the atom-world have space-flying vehicles, and a substance which they can take to make them expand into largeness.

Togaro, a ruthless adventurer, has been trying to usurp power in the atom-world, and it was to put Dianne out of his reach that the scientists first made her large, human-size. When she disappeared, it was to return to her world. But now Togaro has discovered the magnifying drug; and he and his followers were the giants who were menacing the world. Dianne's plan is to have the Ferrules, at her guidance, find the atom world and transport it to where it can be kept under guard. Then when Togaro or any of his men appear, they can be killed while still tiny. For they plan to leave the atom world and seize our Earth, as giants.

Dianne, Drake Ferrule, and Ahlma disappear into the atom-world; and Frank chips off the little piece of rock that holds it, and takes it to the mainland, where it is placed under constant guard. Almost a year later, a man slowly materializes out of the rock. He claims to be Alt, a friend of Drake and Princess Dianne, and says that they want Frank to come inside, bringing some automatics and knives to help combat Togaro's men.

As Frank and Alt are dwindling into the little pit that contains the atom-world, a figure, invisible to the humans outside, but nevertheless gigantic in

comparison to the shrinking pair, leaps out from ambush!

CHAPTER XII.

THE MEETING.

FOR that instant, I was convinced that I was trapped, lured here by Alt to this giant lying in ambush. But Alt shouted:

"Run—that is a Togaro man!"

As Alt went past me, I saw his fear-stricken face. The giant—three or four times my own height—was climbing to his feet. Alt was heading for the broken cliff wall. I ran after him.

Behind us the giant came with a bound. The cliff was fifty feet away. Alt shouted back a warning—something about hiding in a small cave-mouth. There were many small openings; we must get into one too small for the giant to follow.

There was no time for us to take the drug. No time to do anything but run. But in a moment I knew we could never make it. I could hear the thud of the giant's running footsteps, rattling the loose rocks. In a moment more he would have us.

I shouted: "I can't get there, Alt!"

Alt stopped abruptly. He bent and seized a chunk of rock. Futile stand! A hundred feet away, the giant came leaping. He was larger now.

Then I thought of my automatics. In the shock of this sudden encounter I had completely forgotten I was armed. I whipped one out, and stood like a hunter facing a charging elephant. But mine was the trembling courage of desperation.

The fast-growing giant was forty or fifty feet tall now. My automatic felt like a toy as I levelled it. I fired; blindly perhaps at the last. The giant

let out a bellow of rage and pain—and astonishment. He leaped sidewise; he stood fumbling, clutching at his shoulder where my little bullet had stung him.

Alt shoved me. "This way—run!"

We reached the cliff bottom and found a narrow cleft running back in the rock wall. It was only a few feet wide, but we wedged into it and forced our way back a yard or two.

The giant was silent now. In a moment he was outside the crevice, but he was far too large to get in. We heard him poking about; mumbling to himself. Then he seemed to be digging, rattling the rocks. His hand and arm came into the passage probing for us, and I fired again. The report was deafening in this confined space. Powder fumes choked us.

The giant let out another roar, and his arm, wounded no doubt, was withdrawn. He vanished. In the silence, we heard the scuffle of his heavy, retreating footsteps.

We were all but choked; yet we did not dare go out. We crouched, gasping, and presently the air cleared.

There was silence. "Shall we chance it, Alt? Or get smaller in here?"

"Try outside," he whispered. "I think he is gone—getting large, on his way up."

We crept from the rift. The valley outside seemed empty. The giant had vanished. Or was he around here somewhere?

I whispered: "We'd better not move—it might attract his attention."

"No. Wait for a time."

We crouched in the deep shadow of a boulder. No question of Alt's loyalty now, and my instinctive liking for him sprang anew.

"That was a close call, Alt."

: "Yes."

I added, "You want one of these guns?"

In the gloom I could see his pleased expression. I showed him how to aim and fire the automatic. He wore a belt to which was strapped a package of sandwiches and a vacuum of water; I treaded the holster on it.

WE waited, perhaps five or ten minutes, crouching by the rock with the silent, shadowy valley around us. There was still no sign of the giant. There were cañons here, into any one of which he might have plunged. The silence was heavy, oppressive, eerie. A haunted silence, as though here were things not to be seen or heard, yet nevertheless making their presence felt.

I whispered at last, "Shall we start?"

"Yes."

I had been lying on my side, raised on one elbow. There came a movement at my belt; I sensed a tiny indefinable creeping movement upon me. My hand went down with a swift, instinctive gesture—as one moves with a startled hand to knock off an insect. And Alt gave a low, sharp cry.

We both saw it at once. As I sat erect, a small human figure which had been clinging to my belt at the side, scuttled down my leg and leaped off me to the ground. It vanished in the shadows. We made a hurried, startled search, but it was gone. We had briefly seen it—a man the length of my thumb-nail.

"Gone, Alt!"

We searched no further. Impossible task to find such a figure here on these dark rocks.

The thing gave us a shock. We crouched again, waiting, silently listening. This strangely fearsome journey!

Nothing alive save ourselves, here in this brooding place of rocks. Nothing to see, or to hear. Yet it seemed as though there might be living multitudes around us. Humans, not moving in space very far, yet journeying. The giant was gone. He had passed us, moving on into largeness. This tiny figure which had been clinging to me was rushing ahead of us perhaps into smallness.

A singular feeling of dread came upon me. This thing, uncanny! Not the strangeness of size-change. That was now the least of it. But the menace of human enemies; it seemed as though all these shadows held an unseeable human threat.

Strange world of the unseen. Yet in reality not so strange. Upon earth, teeming life throngs always at our feet: the insect world, hardly seen, hardly sensed, yet one's garden is more populous than all the human inhabitants of all the earth. And still smaller, the living world of bacteria. Inconceivable multitudes of living things!

Alt's voice checked my reverie.

"I think it is safe to go on."

We started off again. The crescent pit we found to be some twenty feet deep. There was no trouble descending its broken sides.

Alt said: "Coming out, I could have climbed in this size very easily. But I was smaller. I climbed up here—it seemed a thousand feet."

The giant had evidently been in here, growing, and had waited until the last moment to scramble out. He had been as surprised as ourselves, no doubt, at the sudden encounter.

"There must be many of Togaro's men traveling," said Alt. "They are in every size, traveling, exploring."

This darkling abyss of rocks! I conjured enemies lurking in every shad-

ow ready to spring upon us. Giants—or tiny humans smaller than insects. Enemies of every size and of shifting stature.

WE kept steadily upon our way. The crescent pit opened into a valley with towering mountain ranges for its walls. Then we entered a tunnel mouth. Timing it with unaltered size between one of the pellets, I saw it as a miniature tunnel which our bodies almost blocked. We followed it, from one gloomy cavern to another—a distance seemingly only a few paces. Yet I could envisage that with another pellet it would be a black march of hours in a vast dark void and a desolation of rocks. An army of our enemies might be marching here like that now!

"Alt, how was this route ever found, the first time you traversed it?"

Alt did not know. There was no first time, to his memory, for always there had been a guide. I remembered that years ago, Dianne as an infant had been brought out here and abandoned on Bird's Nest Island. Yet some one had been the first to take the trip. A slow patient exploring, no doubt. Adventuring, perhaps over years of effort—as our pathless earth was tracked and traced by centuries of quest.

Togaro's men were doing that now perhaps. Alt and I discussed it, in the several periods while we stood idle with the rocky, endless waste expanding about us. No one knew, he said, where Togaro was. Out in our world, perhaps.

"He hasn't been seen, Alt?"

"No. His men are very active, and our people flock to join them." But he was reticent about the events transpiring in Dianne's world. "She and Drake will tell you. We must hurry."

We encountered no other Togarites, yet I think that many were passing close to us in size. Going out, I wondered? If they showed themselves, father and Foley would make an end to them promptly.

We stopped once and ate our sandwiches, keeping one of them only against disaster. We finished the water in the vacuum bottle. There was water now occasionally to be seen in pools on the rocks.

The landscape had been continually changing. The light from overhead was long since gone. Occasionally we were in some tunnel or cave of darkness. Yet there always seemed a little light—as though the rocks themselves were radiating a glow.

The air was changing. A brittle crispness. A dryness. And then, when at the termination of the effect of our fourth pellet we found ourselves on a vast metallic plain sloping down into darkness, it incongruously began to rain. A slow, fine drizzle. Overhead I could see moving dark clouds.

We came upon a patch of soil, almost barren, but not quite, for there was sickly vegetation struggling in it. Tiny green things growing. Clumps of them, with small rock ridges a foot high lying like snakes.

The drizzle was fine as a mist. After a few moments, it ceased. Abruptly I realized that the puffs of cloud were very small and close over our heads. And again my whole viewpoint shifted. I was a tremendous giant standing here, towering to the clouds. A tiny forest was here at my feet; the ridges were rocky ranges of hills.

I strove to encompass thought of the journey as a whole. We had been only a few hours. It seemed that we had descended thousands of feet into the bowels of some vast world of naked

rock. Perhaps we had. In our present size, I am sure the entire trip would have been miles of distance. Yet to father, up there now in that inconceivably titanic world, we were still near the surface of the porous rock fragment.

We took another pellet, and the landscape grew.

Alt gripped me. "See—the light!"

A steady red spot of light was visible near by.

Alt said: "Drake's signal."

We saw Drake first. He stood in the growing forest as our dwindling bodies came down into it. The red light painted his figure as he leaned against a stunted tree-trunk.

"Frank!"

"Drake—Drake, we see you!"

We adjusted our size. He came running forward. He called back: "Dianne! Ahlma, Dianne—they've come!"

It was so good to feel his handclasp!

"Father all right, Frank?"

"Yes."

"You've got the rock guarded?"

"Yes, Drake, we—"

And then I saw Dianne. The glory of her beauty swept me. She ran up and kissed me.

"Frank, dear—"

I do not know what I was to her then. But to me, this was not my sister. A thousand times more strongly now, I felt it. And no princess this. Just a girl!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STOWAWAY.

WE stood in the shadows of the dark forest, with its gnarled, stunted trees. The red light flamed near by. A dim figure glided up to Drake. He gave an order; the

figure hastened away. In a moment, the red light vanished.

Drake spoke hurriedly. He and Dianne and Ahlma were leading Alt and me toward where the red light had been. Drake half whispered:

"We saw you coming—lighted the red signal for Alt. Dangerous to keep it lighted now; Togaro's flyer has been here. His men—they may be near this size—would capture our flyer if they could."

We hardly went a hundred yards. To my questions Drake was impatient. "Presently, Frank. Here, this way."

I saw, in an open space, the dim shape of an inter-planetary vehicle. An elongated globe, forty feet long, with its bulging middle half as wide. It lay dark and silent; but I saw that it had elliptical windows and a small doorway which stood open to receive us.

Strange vehicle! As we approached I could see that what I had thought was a dead-black thing of metal was in reality far different. Drake hurried us up a small ladder, into its interior. But I saw that the vehicle's side was not solid.

It seemed rather a myriad woven wires. The thing was a big cage, woven of intricate metal threads like a basket. Rigid, yet resilient.

I learned afterward some of the details of this strange vehicle. Standing inert, as it was now, the outer air circulated freely through it. The wire, of which its hull and all its interior ribs and braces was composed, was drawn from a ductile metal unknown to our world, a metal which contracted or expanded freely under the impulse of an alternation of electronic current. With the current charging it, the hull became a solid electrical surface, with the entire interior an active magnetic field, so that ourselves and all the con-

tents of the vehicle were contracted in size as the hull diminished.

No drugs were needed now. We could use them inside the vehicle merely to change our size in comparison to the vehicle itself.

There were chemical air-renewers, and heaters to keep the interior warm against the cold of inter-planetary space.

An inter-planetary voyage! I could not at first grasp it. No vast space was here. We were in a dark forest, with a limited mountain valley around us. No stars were overhead; no great astronomical reaches were here. Where could this vehicle go? Into smallness, I knew that. But how? Sail off over these stunted trees? Why, in a moment with any speed at all it could reach the mountain barrier down which Alt and I had just come.

But I knew, as I pondered, that if this flyer remained just where it was, as it diminished in size, sufficient space for any flight would open up around it.

The door was barred behind us. We passed along a low, narrow passage, walking on a metal grid of woven wires. I saw small rooms; ladders leading up and down to other levels. A small room, crowded with strange instruments faintly throbbing as though all this wired bundle of mechanism was impatient to be gone.

We came to a little room with a window in the concave side of the hull; a table of woven wire; and a few wire chairs.

"Sit down," said Drake. "You particularly, Frank—be careful as we start. Your first voyage! The shock is different from the drug. I see you brought the weapons?"

"Yes. Do you want them now, Drake?"

"Keep them. We'll look them over presently. Sit quiet, Frank." He spoke hurriedly, abstractedly. "We must get started at once."

He hastened from the room to give orders for the starting. I had seen some eight or ten men aboard the vehicle. Four were in the instrument control room; Drake went in there.

I SAT down, with Dianne beside me. Alt was whispering to Ahlma nearby. Dianne murmured:

"Don't talk now—just for a moment."

I sat waiting. This vehicle, with its many small rooms; its small passages, gave me again the impression that I was too large for my surroundings. Drake had stooped as he went through the arcade into the adjacent control room.

The dark trees showed motionless outside the window.

Dianne murmured: "Now, Frank."

It was a slow transition. The wire walls of the room turned faintly luminous. They hummed. A dull red glow suffused everything. The wire floor, the ceiling, the chair upon which I was sitting, all glowed red, like wire slowly heating. Red, then yellow, then almost white, with a cast of violet. But my hand on the chair-arm felt it to be cool as before.

I was conscious of a slight shock. A lurch. But it was within my head, for the room did not move. Everything was glowing white. Yet the room remained dim, for the light did not radiate. There was a throbbing; a hissing, whining sound of the surging current.

Then the air of the room turned electrical. It faintly snapped; occasionally in mid-air, a burst of small blue sparks exploded like a bomb. The outlines of the walls and ceiling and the

furniture were lit with tiny blue lightnings.

Then I felt the real shock. A swoop of all my senses; a second, in which I thought I was gone, falling, with only the consciousness of Dianne's firm hand holding me.

A moment, then the shock was passed. I steadied, and found that save for a queer lightness and a tingling, I felt no different from before.

Dianne murmured: "That's all, Frank; you're past it."

"Yes. Have we started?"

"Oh, yes."

Drake came back. He eyed me approvingly, but made no comment. He sat beside us.

"Let's see what weapons you brought. Frank, did you encounter any of Togaro's people? His flyer brought some out. A few. Not many yet. We haven't seen Togaro—we don't know where he is. But his expedition is ready. They don't know that we control the fragment of rock—that they cannot escape from it. They're coming out."

"If they do, father will stop them."

Drake was willing enough to talk now. He said: "Yes, father will stop them. That doesn't worry us. But in the atom—in Dianne's world—did Alt tell you? They've got a single vehicle, like this one, Frank. They keep it hidden. We can't find it—or haven't been able to, yet. Togaro's leaders are winning our people, firing them with desire to conquer the earth."

DIANNE said: "When we get there—but, oh, Frank, I'm so glad you've come!" Her hand lay on mine; her fingers had gone cold. This was no regal princess—just an apprehensive, frightened little girl. Glad I had come! The weapons I had brought

might be of use in this affair. But myself—what good could I be, trying to cope with a nation in revolt? Yet instinctively she turned to me.

"I'm worried, Frank. These are my people—this is my world at stake. The Togarites are telling our workers that never will they have to work again."

Drake interrupted passionately: "Dianne has told them they can't conquer the earth, that we control things up above! But they don't believe it. So now I'm going to threaten them. A bullet—they'll think that's magic. A knife thrust—and, Frank, we can't use the size-change as a weapon in Dianne's world. We dare not grow too large. You'll understand—you can understand now if you think of it. The Togarites leaders have the drugs. They lurk everywhere in a size abnormally small. Sometimes they grow gigantic. But they dare not get too large."

"You see, we cannot fight them in largeness upon Dianne's little earth. There is a limit to what is safe. We have avoided such combat, and so have they. But they are more daring now."

"Their main expedition into largeness is about ready. It's all being done secretly—Dianne and her government are powerless to stop it. We think that a multitude of her people are willing to join Togaro's expedition. The leaders have been waiting for Togaro, but he has not come."

I said, "Because he's out in our earth-world and can't get in."

"Yes, doubtless. And now they won't wait any longer. The disaster, in spite of everything Dianne and I have been able to do, is now upon us."

My mind groped with these strange things he was saying. A group of a hundred or more Togarite leaders had for years been in possession of the

drugs. They had built themselves an interplanetary size-changing vehicle, like this one in which we were now traveling. They kept it hidden—in some small size, doubtless. Dianne's controlling government would have destroyed it, but they could not find it.

The drugs were kept from the public, of course. But these bandit Togarite leaders had them; and they could not be discovered and confiscated either.

The Togarites wanted, Drake said; about a half million followers. With this multitude they would conquer the earth and populate it with their own race.

"Why?" I demanded. "Why do that?"

My question sounded inane. Drake shrugged. "Why has any conqueror lusted for power? The original Togarite leaders are evil fellows, renegades. Togaro himself tried to conquer Dianne's world, and failed. They want power, riches, plunder. Togaro wants all that. And he wants—Dianne."

I could feel Dianne stir against me. I said nothing, and in a moment Drake went on:

"There are ten million of Dianne's people, upon a little globe which they populate fully. Just the one nation. Perhaps by now the Togarites have their half million followers. They plan to transport them out—up to our world—"

"How?" I demanded. "A single flyer, like this, to transport five hundred thousand people! Why, it would take thousands of trips! Ten or twenty years—"

But as I said it, I understood why that was not so—and comprehended the deadly danger to Dianne's world. I began: "If they make their vehicle

large enough to contain half a million people at once—"

I never finished.

ONCE before, in the room at King's Cove, Ahlma had given a cry to warn us of impending danger. She did that now. She and Alt were sitting near us, listening to our words. Drake had previously taken the automatics from me. We had put them on a vacant chair; one lay on the floor close by my feet.

I heard Ahlma give a startled cry. The automatic on the floor had been lying between Drake and me. I remembered clearly where I had placed it, but it was not there now! I followed Ahlma's glance. The weapon was on the floor, over by the wall. It was moving—sliding soundlessly toward the door of the room. I saw that a small human figure was tugging at it—a man eight or ten inches high. As tall as he dared get. The weapon was larger than himself. He was struggling to drag it to the doorway, get it beyond our sight.

Ahlma's cry made us all leap to our feet. And Dianne and Ahlma together recognized the tiny figure.

"Togaro!"

He dropped his burden and scuttled from the room. Dianne gripped me. "Wait, Frank! You're unsteady yet—you'll hurt yourself."

I found the floor swaying under me as I stood up; I had to drop back.

Drake and Alt dashed into the passage. We could hear their cries giving the alarm. Several members of the crew came running. The passages and all the cabins were searched.

Useless! Togaro had taken the diminishing drug. With such a start, he had escaped into smallness beyond pursuit.

Drake and Alt came back. "It was too dark. We could not see where he went at all. No use trying to follow him."

Togaro, a stowaway on board!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOCKED DOOR.

AMAZING voyage into smallness! I find an adequate picture of it difficult to paint. It was, as Drake had said, a voyage shorter in time than I had been led to expect. Fifteen or twenty hours of elapsed time, perhaps. We tried to preserve a normality of routine. We ate several meals, and I tried to sleep. For the remainder of the time we sat in that small room, by the window; and I gazed at a panorama so singularly awe-inspiring that I am at a loss now to describe it.

For some time the ship did not seem to move. We sat talking. There was obviously no movement. The room was steady, save for a humming vibration. But outside the window things were changing. The forest trees were sliding upward. Expanding, and drawing away. We were dwindling faster than an intensity of the drug. Then I felt the ship lift slightly. We hung poised in a rocky void.

The discovery that Togaro was on board was so disquieting that for a time I did not know, or care, what the ship was doing. Togaro, using us now to give him passage back to Dianne's world! But we had thought him outside the rock fragment! Barred from it, by our careful guards.

And then it flashed over me. Togaro had been lurking in some tiny size, outside our King's Cove house. He had heard the alarm which I gave

to father and Foley when Alt arrived with his white flag. He had slipped into the room, in the confusion of father's entrance. He had clung to my shoe lace, had been raised with me to the granite slab; he had ridden me like an insect clinging to my belt. How well I recalled now the feeling that something was there!

And it was he whom we had seen leaping from me, just after our encounter with the giant

Togaro, lurking here on board our space-ship! I glanced around with an inward shudder. He could be here, small as an ant, crawling upon me now—an ant with human intelligence; a human enemy.

He could be lurking here, and, with our attention flagging, he could grow to the size of my hand—and in that size could—

I conjured all manner of wild, gruesome thoughts. Nor were they all picturing danger to myself or to Dianne's world. Nor even the threatened conquest of earth. There was a danger that seemed to me now greater than any of these. Togaro desired Dianne!

I sat close by Dianne. I tried to tell myself that there was nothing to fear. Togaro would not dare get large, here on our ship. For if he did, at once we would seize him.

We discussed it. The thing seemed incredible, that he was here so close to us and we could not find him. Incredible, but true.

The thought flung my imagination downward into a new realization of Infinite Smallness. Here on this dwindling ship, an inch of space at my feet still held vast realms. I could select any inch here on the floor, and, becoming small enough, wander lost in it for a lifetime.

We stood at the window, Dianne,

Drake, and I. But Alt and Ahlma would not relax their watching of the room. The ship had been dwindling now for more than an hour. The forest was gone.

I saw a dark void, in which seemingly we were hanging in mid-air. At first I thought it was wholly dark. But as I stared, with my eyes—or perhaps merely my mind—becoming accustomed to this pregnant darkness, I found that there were things to see.

While hung motionless in the void. But presently rock walls were visible; how far away I could not guess. Great mountains of rock, expanding, sliding upward, and drawing away, though they did not vanish. It seemed that my vision must be sharpening, or that the light was increasing. It was a queer sort of light—an iridescence, vaguely diffused throughout everything.

For a long while this went on. The visual sensation was that we were falling like a swiftly dropping elevator car. But it was not so. The rock walls were sliding upward, but it was largely an optical illusion.

A meal was served us. The ship was reaching a greater intensity of its shrinking size, dwindling more rapidly.

I could hear the current rising to a higher, sharper and louder whine.

Drake said, "That's a hundred times faster for us now."

Another few hours. The scene outside was undergoing a progressive change. The distant rocks constantly had a different aspect. I could not fathom it—could not define it. A suggestion of roundness. I stared at the far-away wall. It seemed as though off there great round things were piled in loose masses. A wall of boulders loosely piled.

Once, I fancied that they were in movement — creeping, crawling, one upon the other. And that all the wall was unsolid. A thing of slow, ponderous movement.

I became suddenly aware that once more my viewpoint had abruptly changed. I had envisaged us as a tiny ship, hanging in a great dark void, with dark round things at some inconceivable distance. And then I saw it was not so. We were a tremendous ship! These round objects were tiny particles. Close at hand. Dark, yet glowing. Moving, sliding one upon the other with a suggestion of fluidity. Nor were they just here in this one direction. With my face against the window I could see them overhead. And below. And across the near-by corridor of the ship, a window there showed them the same on that side.

From everywhere they crowded us. Abruptly it seemed that we were not in a void, but in a narrow, confined area with these particles jostling us. They were all of a size—all of a similar aspect. Tiny things, with space between them. Flowing like a fluid as we pushed our way among them.

Drake said, "They are molecules, Frank. The molecules of the rock fragment. We'll soon enter one—and then enter our atom."

I did not answer him. My thoughts went winging off. Millions of molecules here. Millions? Countless myriads. They shifted and crawled; jostled; swept past, and away. Then there seemed a darkness as of an empty void. But always I saw them again.

The scene was always changing. Open space now, with banks like clouds of the clustering molecules in the distance. I fixed my attention upon one such cloud. It was coming rapidly nearer—or perhaps we were speeding

toward it. A luminous cloud. It came up and went past. The molecules were huge and few. I thought perhaps in that group there were not more than thirty.

Clouds speeding, with dark voids between. Why, this was space! Gigantic space here.

Then I saw just two of the round things jostle past. And then some which went by all alone. Giant things now, glowing, unsolid! I began to think I could see that still other, smaller particles were clinging together to form each of these unsolid molecules.

I saw one go past, and caught a glimpse of what seemed empty space within its luminous outline—and then I could almost fancy I saw the atoms, a whirling swarm of them clustering to make this unsolid outline.

DRAKE'S words rang in my thoughts. Enter one of these molecules? Find our atom?

I said, "Drake, how can this ship be guided? How in Heaven's name can we—"

He told me—or tried to tell me. I am no scientist, to put down here abstruse explanations of a subject so vastly unknown. Nor would I obtrude them into this narrative. I recall that Drake explained how by a shifting of gravitational force this vehicle could be guided for space-flight. That I understood. The bow of the ship made attractive—to receive the gravitational attraction of whatever masses of matter lay in that direction. And the stern made repellent, or neutral, at will. All that I could understand. An interplanetary flyer, of the sort which often on earth had been contemplated.

The size-change principle was also comprehensible in fundamental gen-

eralities. But how, upon this inward trip, could we search these myriad molecules for one particular molecule? And then find one atom? And within that atom find one electron—or a proton, whichever it might be—within which was a vast reach of astronomical space?

Drake called our guiding instrument a spectrometer—an instrument tuned to the vibrations of Dianne's world. He spoke of being able to search out the characteristic spectrum; he spoke of electronic resistance factors; of the aura of this designated world we sought, its atomic force which, as we approached it—or receding, went astray—was shown upon our instrument, thus to guide us.

Let the textbooks explain it. There are many such now being published. I can record only those things I saw and did. And they, in truth, are strange enough so that I can only affirm by veracity and let it pass at that.

Beyond our windows came a void of emptiness, with only occasional single molecules drifting past. They were always larger. Then I saw them as objects enormous. Great dark worlds of that unsolid stuff we call solidity!

Drake insisted that I try and get some sleep. The ship was being patrolled end to end for any sign of Togaro; but there was none.

Dianne urged, "You must sleep, Frank. We must all keep normal. There will be so much to do when we arrive."

"To-morrow," said Drake.

To-morrow! So incongruous a term! All normality of time or space seemed gone. But I did try to sleep, and for a while must have done so, for I dreamed a phantasmagoria of shifting things in a void of blackness.

I wakened to find Drake alone at the window.

"The girls are sleeping, Frank. No sign of Togaro. Sit here by me."

He had an automatic in his hand. We both wore belts of the drugs—and a belt with holsters for the other weapons.

"Look, Frank."

W^h had been in the vehicle now some twelve or fifteen hours.

I was astonished when Drake told me I had slept four hours at least. I saw outside the window now a scene wholly different from before. We had reached, and been maintaining now for a considerable time, our fastest rate of diminishing size-change. Much faster than near the beginning of the voyage, and conceivably faster than the most rapid rate that the drugs could give.

I gazed in awe from the window. This was astronomical space indeed! I saw a vast reach of blackness, with blazing stars. Great suns, resplendent with a corona of flame. White, dull red—some of them yellow. They lay strewn like gems on a black velvet cloth. Some were in clusters, faint as luminous dust in the distance. Above us there was a great band of glittering star-mist, like the Milky Way.

The whole brilliant scene was swift with electronic movement as of stars. But I realized that our vehicle was not only dwindling, but sweeping forward in a flight of tremendous speed. The stars went by in a steady drift. The heavens in advance of us seemed opening up; the points of light sped past our window and drew together behind us.

Tremendous celestial panorama! I was lost in awe watching it. There were spaces of blackness devoid of

stars. Sometimes, far off to the side, a lens-shaped cluster would drift past, to be lost in the distance behind us. A universe of itself. Or a great spiral nebular—I saw one which with a visible movement seemed rotating.

Then ahead of us another universe would come. A faintly luminous patch. Spreading wide as we sped toward it—until all in a moment, it seemed, after crossing an empty void we were again among stars. Great suns blazing alone. Or binaries, rotating with slow dignity about a common center of gravity. Or suns, with smaller, dark worlds swinging in orbits around them. Planets! We could see some of them, shining like moons in every phase; and some held satellites of their own.

We had for hours been within the atom. And one of these planets, somewhere here ahead of us, was Dianne's world!

I gazed, and there grew upon me presently the realization of a very strange aspect to this glittering scene. These blazing worlds were not large! It caught at my breath, this realization. I regarded a flaming point off to the side. It was drifting backward. A monstrous world of incandescent gas, millions of miles off there? I suddenly realized that was not so. Why, it was a mere pin-point! An enduring spark! It was not far away, but close outside our window. A monstrous, giant sun—yes. But our vehicle was still so infinitely larger! Why, this was no vast reach of space—not compared to us!

I saw us plunge into a myriad points of light. A universe of stars. But they were still so small in comparison with us, that we crowded our huge bulk in among them. I saw some of them strike against our hull—pin-points of fire harmlessly tiny.

We went through an incandescent

cloud of them; they bombarded us like a rain of sparks. We plunged through and came again to a cavern of emptiness, and then another universe, appearing ahead of us.

I could see now the effect of our dwindling. These sparks were growing, expanding steadily.

DRAKE had several times left me to consult the men in the control room. He said once, as he returned: "You see, Frank, what I mean by haste. We are chancing it." His tone carried an apprehension. "There are millions of light-years of distance to be covered in here. That is, they would be light-years when we were small. While we are large they can be crossed in a brief time. If we were to wait until we were smaller, and then make the voyage, this space-flight would take weeks, months perhaps. Yet we dare not cause too much astronomical disturbance. We must be normally small before we approach Dianne's world—not to disturb it in its orbit."

I said, "Are we near there, Drake?"

"Yes, near in time. They've just told me our forward flight must stop. From here, a size-change only. And then, when we are safely small, a short voyage—and then we'll land."

"How long, Drake?"

"They said a few hours."

He sat down beside me. The scene outside the window had another, more familiar aspect now. The side-drift of the stars was stopped. They were widening out. Shifting both upward and downward, and receding from us as we grew small among them. I fixed my gaze on one which was level with our window. It seemed moving away. Drawing away to a great distance, yet it always remained visually as bright

as before. A tiny spark, growing to a great blazing world.

How long a time passed as I sat there, absorbed, I do not know. Two hours or more, undoubtedly. Drake occasionally talked, and I answered him vaguely. They were still diligently searching for Togaro, but it was a fruitless quest.

I recall that I suggested we might use care in disembarking, so that Togaro would be kept a prisoner in smallness here on board.

But that was impractical, as Drake at once pointed out. Togaro could easily make himself an inch high and still be reasonably safe from our observation. No use for us to guard the vehicle doorway. When our size-changing current was cut off, the wire hull of the ship was not solid. A figure an inch high could squeeze out through the side of the hull very easily. Of what use to guard the door!

"We can't get him, Frank. If he's cautious, handles his size right, he's safe from us."

Safe from us! But the thought, like an omen, swept me: were we safe from him?

I said, "Shouldn't the girls wake up by now?"

It seemed that they had been sleeping a very long time; Drake and I had had another meal served us.

"They went in just before you woke up, Frank. Only three hours—the rest will do them good—they were worn out."

He had already told me that they were being carefully guarded. But now, as though it were a premonition, a fear grew upon me.

"Can't we go see them, Drake? Make sure they are all right?"

He gave me a startled glance. "Come on."

7 A

I was steady enough on my feet now. We went into the small, dim passageway. It was whining and throbbing with the electrical sounds of our size-change. An uproar of rhythmic throbs—one could shout along here and scarce be heard above it.

"THERE'S the guard," said Drake.

A man sat in the passage—a dark figure sitting with his back against the passage wall. I could see an automatic in his hand. Not Alt, who had retired for some much needed sleep, but a trusted member of the crew.

We went to the guard. He spoke English. He looked up and said:

"It is all right—nothing has shown."

He sat facing an open doorway. It gave into a room, like a small stateroom on a ship. We stood there, silently looking in. The stateroom was lighted, with the light arranged so that it fell upon a couch-like bed.

The girls lay there in each other's arms, peacefully sleeping. Dianne in a golden robe similar to the one she had worn upon her former trip; Ahlma in a robe of blue. Their long tresses were mingled upon them. Peaceful, beautiful faces, with the strange crescent moon on their foreheads.

Drake and I stood a moment gazing silently. He whispered:

"They're all right, Frank. Come back."

We tiptoed away, with a murmured admonition to the guard.

We sat again in our room by the window, watching the shifting, growing stars, talking of the strange problems which were ahead of us.

Alt came. He looked refreshed.

"We will be there in two hours," he said as he sat down with us. He and Drake pondered what would happen

when we reached Dianne's world. Alt told how I had arranged with father for us to display a black-and-white-striped flag as a signal to him when we came back.

I heard them vaguely. I was uneasy; then I realized that I was suddenly wildly frightened. I jumped up and went to the door. Down the passage I could see the guard. He sat alert. He noticed me. He gestured reassurance.

I went back to Drake and Alt. But upon me there was so powerful a premonition that it struck me cold. But I said nothing. It was so strange a characteristic of the human mind that one may sit obsessed with a chilling fear and endeavor to fight against it and call it a weakness of the imagination!

Another fifteen minutes. It must have been easily that long, in the light of after events. Then I jumped up again.

As I got to the door, my heart pounded with the thrill of terror. The guard was still in his place, fifteen feet down the shadowed passage. But there was something unnatural in his hunched position as he sat with his back against the wall. His head seemed to have sunk forward upon his chest. Asleep.

My cry brought Drake and Alt running after me. We rushed to the guard. Asleep?

His hand on the floor held the automatic. His head was slumped. I shook him. His inert body twisted, and fell sidewise. And we saw, sticking in his chest, a tiny sword like a bodkin plunged skillfully between his ribs to reach his heart.

Murdered!

The door to the girls' staterooms was closed! We jerked at it. Locked on

the inside. We pounded, shouted, kicked at it frantically.

There was only silence from within.

CHAPTER XV.

TOGARU AT BAY.

THE silence was horrible. If the girls were in there, why didn't they answer? We thumped and pounded.

"Dianne! Dianne, answer us! Ahlma—Ahlma—"

Our cries brought members of the crew. The body of the murdered guard was shoved aside. We jammed the passage, assailing the stout metal door which was glowing with the current in it.

"Dianne—Dianne dear!"

The door resisted our efforts. We stood listening; I put my ear against the door.

Only silence. It seemed that even a scream would be less horrible.

"Break it down," exclaimed Drake. "We must hurry!" He flung his powerful body against it, but the door held. Alt came running with a metal bar. We rammed. The passage was too narrow to give us room. But at last the door yielded a little and we got the bar into the crack and pried.

We burst into the room. Ahlma lay upon the bed, unconscious. Her robe was torn; there were bruises upon her temple, her shoulder and arm. The room showed evidences of struggle.

Dianne was gone!

Ahlma had fainted or been knocked unconscious. We revived her presently. Meanwhile we were searching the room, examining every inch of it for tiny human forms who might be lurking in the shadows, still large enough to be visible.

But there was nothing.

"Watch the doorsill!" Drake commanded. "If he's here—he may make a rush to get out—"

They carried away the body of the murdered guard; two men knelt, with faces close to the doorsill, watching it.

But there was nothing.

We knew, even before Ahlma revived, what must have happened. Togaro with an inch or two or height, armed with a needle-like sword, had crept upon our guard in the passage. Amazing, reckless villain!

He must have dared to crawl upon the guard; then leaped, plunging his little sword like a long needle into the guard's heart.

Then he had scuttled into the girls' room, to grow large and softly close its door. He had fifteen minutes, probably, before we discovered the murder.

Ahlma revived and told us the rest of it. She had been awakened to find Togaro—in a size nearly as large as herself—forcing a pellet of the drug upon Dianne. The girls struggled and fought. Their screams, barred by the closed door and the humming, throbbing ship, had not been heard. Togaro had taken the diminishing drug, and forced some of it upon Dianne. He had struck at Ahlma. Her senses faded. Her last memory was the sight of Togaro standing in the middle of the floor with Dianne gripped in his arms. Both he and Dianne were dwindling.

We searched the room again. But we could find nothing.

Were Togaro and Dianne still here? If he was still here, we could keep him here in smallness. If he had got small in the center of the room it might be hours, or days of marching to reach the doorway and through it to the passage, even if he could find his way.

Drake cried, "By heaven, we won't land! I'll keep this ship in space until we find him! Starve him out—there'll be no food probably, here in smallness on the floor of this room."

But starve Dianne also! I was shuddering. Dianne here—down here by my feet perhaps—here with Togaro, hiding or wandering in some desolate abyss of smallness. Or perhaps we had already trodden upon them!

WE stood with sudden terror, hardly daring to move. But were they here? I said, "Let's try getting small, Drake. We've got to try something. Get small here—in the center of the room where Ahlma says she saw them. Search for them. Drake, we've got to get her away from him!"

I was talking wildly and I knew it. Drake gripped me.

"Wait, let's try and figure it out. Easy, Frank—don't let's lose our wits."

It seemed as though every moment was vital. I stood listening to Drake's theory. Theory, at such a time! A surge of self-condemnation was upon me. If only I had had the sense to stay close by Dianne!

Drake was trying to estimate what Togaro had done. This door had been barred on the inside. But there was a crack under the bottom of the door an eighth of an inch high, at least. Drake closed the door for a moment and showed me it.

"Frank, they could be anywhere. Not here in the room—he wouldn't stay here in the room—he had fifteen minutes maybe."

With sinking heart I realized how easily he could have escaped out of here. He and Dianne, diminishing say to an inch. Then walking to the locked

door. Dwindling again—walking, carrying Dianne—through the crack under the door.

He had had fifteen minutes—and another fifteen had now passed. He could indeed be almost anywhere in the ship.

We saw the hopelessness of it. Drake could only reiterate, "By heaven, I won't land. I'll keep him here on board until we find him."

Ahlma was still weak and faint. She lay on the couch, watching us. Alt sat beside her. She said:

"Drake, I am so sorry. I should have done better."

Alt said stoutly, "How could you? You tried to fight him."

Drake went to her. She reached up with her slim hand and touched him.

"Drake, Frank, you do not blame me—?"

Blame her? She had fought with all her little strength. Her torn robe, her face and arm and shoulder with the flesh bruised where Togaro had gripped and struck her, were mute evidence of the fight she had put up.

"I know," she said. "But Dianne is gone. If—If we lose her—never will I forgive myself. I should not have slept. I should have watched."

How she echoed my inner condemnation of myself!

Drake began, "No, Ahlma—" He got no further. There was a sound near by—a scream! Not that exactly. A shout. It sounded above the throbbing, humming of the ship.

We stood frozen, listening.

"Drake, you heard it? Where was it?"

He murmured, "What was it? A voice—"

Not in this cabin. We stood listening in the doorway. Diagonally along the passage on the other side was the

door to another small cabin. It stood open. Had the shout come from there? We had searched all the cabins ten minutes before. We did not dare move without extreme care. An incautious step might crush Dianne.

There was a guard out here in the passage. All the crew were forbidden to move except with the greatest circumspection. The guard said, "It sounded in there. Shall I go?"

A moment of waiting. I murmured, "Drake, over there."

It came again, unmistakably from that opposite cabin. A single shouted word, but we heard it.

"Frank!"

Dianne's voice!

We rushed. No need for caution now. Hardly more than a dozen steps to that open cabin doorway. But as we reached it, the heavy door clanged violently in our faces!

We stood baffled. We shouted. "Dianne! Dianne, are you in there?"

From behind the barred door came Togaro's jeering, sardonic laughter.

"We are here. Come in and get us—if you dare!"

CHAPTER XVI.

FRANK'S PLAN.

THIS door, like the other, resisted our efforts to smash it. Alt ran to get the bar.

We called, "Dianne!"

She did not answer. With my ear against the door, it seemed that I could hear a movement inside.

"Dianne! If you can speak, answer me!"

I thought I could hear a low, gruff murmur. I demanded, "Togaro! Open the door!"

No answer.

Drake shouted, "Damn it, we'll break it down! Here, give me that bar!"

We assaulted the door. In the silence between our blows, Togaro's mocking laugh sounded again. It chilled me; horrible, sardonic, confident laughter.

The door began yielding. I warned, "Drake, your automatic."

He handed the bar to Alt and the two men of the ship's crew who had joined us. Ahlma, white and trembling, but eager, stood among us. Drake swept her behind him. He and I stood with weapons ready.

"Now, Alt."

With a last blow the door fell inward. From where we crowded in the passage the front portion of the little cabin was exposed. The huge legs of Togaro were bent like a jackknife as he sat wedged in the room! We could see at first only the lower half of him.

Drake jumped into the doorway; his weapon went up. Togaro's voice sounded—a dull gruff roar.

"Wait, you fool! Do not kill me!"

It checked, for that instant, the shot that Drake might have fired. I was beside Drake now. The whole interior of the cabin was filled with the huge body of Togaro. He sat sidewise to the door. The knees of his bent legs were nearly as high as our heads. His back was jammed against the state-room bunk; his head as he sat hunched forward, crowded the ceiling. His body was wedged solid into the little room.

And upon his lap, held against his chest, Dianne was standing upright. Her head came hardly to his bent shoulders. His arm encircled her.

The scene froze us for an instant. The giant, evil face of Togaro, above Dianne's head, leered down at us.

He said, "Do not kill me! Do not dare! Dianne, tell them to talk to me—not to shoot."

I met Dianne's gaze. Her size in relation to me, was about normal. Her face was pale, but she seemed unhurt. She gasped:

"Frank—Drake—don't try to kill him—you don't understand—"

Why not kill him? He was holding Dianne in front of him—but from where I stood I could have sent a bullet into his brain and not endangered Dianne.

Or would his death throes have crushed her? I did not dare fire, yet. Drake felt the same. He lowered his weapon; he pushed mine down.

"Wait a minute, Frank. Easy."

Togaro's smile widened. His broad, heavy face had a look of monstrous evil. He said, "Why, that is better. Now we will talk."

"What do you want to say?" Drake demanded. "Let Dianne go. Dianne, climb down—"

It brought a gibe. "How can she climb down?"

"I said, 'We've got you. I can put a bullet into your head in a second. Do you know what a bullet is?'"

"I know. Yes, young man, I know very well. But you won't do that. Quiet, Dianne—stand quiet, I am not hurting you."

His tone changed wholly as he admonished her. Ironic, to me; gentle, solicitous, and yet ironic also, to her.

I threatened, "But I will! We'll give you one minute!"

DRAKE pushed me back. "What have you got to say, Togaro?"

You're caught. You can't get smaller—we can kill you in an instant with these deadly weapons. You can't hurt us."

He was indeed so wedged into the cabin that he could scarcely move. But Drake was making empty threats. Togaro interrupted him calmly, "Can't hurt you! But you cannot kill me so fast that I will not also kill Dianne. Crush her to death; here in my arms. Quiet, sweet one, I am not crushing you—yet."

We saw now that Togaro's hand held a pellet of the drug, a pellet expanded to the size of a marble. He showed it to us.

"The enlarging drug. I think I can get it into my mouth, Drake, before you can kill me. It will be effective ten minutes at least after my death. Did you know that? Ten minutes of my body growing, here in this small room—"

He left the sentence to our imagination. Across his huge lap the cabin window was visible. Outside it I could glimpse the black void of space—a dull-red crescent hung out there, with white stars blazing around it.

Our ship was here in space. A growth of Togaro's body, and he would burst the roof of this cabin and wreck the ship.

Drake stammered, "But you—you would not dare—"

"Nor would you," Togaro returned calmly. "You do not want me to crush Dianne. Or break this tiny ship and kill us all. I do not want it. Fear nothing, I am no more anxious to die than you. There is of it nothing for you to fear. I would not like to hurt my little Dianne." His hand encompassed the span of her shoulder and back with a gesture like a caress.

Drake stammered, boiling with rage. "You—" Then he caught himself, and added: "Then we'll do nothing. But I won't land. You can't get out of here. Sit there—"

"Oh yes, you'll land," The tone was a sudden grim menace. "That is my world out there. You see it—that crescent with our sunlight upon it? In an hour, with proper handling of this ship, we can be descending into its atmosphere. I will give you an hour."

I said, "Suppose we don't? You can't tell us what to do."

Dianne had all this time been silent. Her face was bloodless; her lips set tight. Her eyes went to me, then to Drake. She said abruptly:

"Do—what you think best. If you shoot him, he might kill only me—"

It seemed that her eyes were imploring us to understand something she was not saying. She gave a faint gesture; and then we understood, but so did Togaro.

He broke in ironically: "She thinks that with her little body, struggling here in my arms, she could prevent me from taking the drug." It amused him. "She wants you to shoot me, and I will crush her in my death agony—but you and the ship will be saved. My brave little Dianne!"

He ended, half sarcastic, but half sincere. And he added as we were silent, "Gruesome things to talk about. It is better to stop such talk; don't you think so? You do not dare take such chances. You know it and so do I. That is why I am commanding—and it is for you to obey. You understand, Drake?"

We knew we were defeated. Drake said, "Yes. What do you want?"

"Go now and tell them in the control room to land as soon as possible. That is simple."

Drake turned away. "You watch here, Frank. Keep him covered."

Togaro laughed. "You may all stand and watch me. I am not going to move—just sit here with Dianne."

I would not hurt my little Dianne—do not fear it.”

I STOOD, a few moments later, in the passage whispering with Drake.

We had an hour of grace. Togaro from the window beside him, could see our progress toward landing. We did not dare do anything else with the ship.

But there was an hour. And I had a plan. Desperate; to me, with my inexperience in these strange conditions, it was a plan incredibly awesome. Yet I could think of nothing else which might be done. A plan by which I might rescue Dianne and kill Togaro.

I whispered it to Drake.

He said at last, “Yes, I guess it’s the only thing. You think I should go with you? Two of us—”

“No. The chances are better with one.”

“Then I will try it,” he said. But I shook my head.

We stood out of Togaro’s sight and hearing. Ahlma was with us.

Ahlma said, “But, Frank, you are not used to it. If you would trust it to a girl—”

But that was not feasible. Drake would have been better than I, no doubt.

“If I do not come back,” I urged, “you, Drake, are needed here. And when the ship lands—it is you who are needed, not I.”

It seemed the best thing to do. I had an hour before the landing. And I was ready now. I needed no preparations. I wore my belt of the drugs; I carried a knife like a short sword.

Drake cautioned me with anxious words. “It will be all how you judge your size; and luck.”

“Yes,” I whispered. “Luck.”

Ahlma pressed my hand. “We will pray for you—for your good luck.”

I edged up as close to the doorway of Togaro’s cabin as I could get without his seeing me.

I took the diminishing drug.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TINY PROWLER.

“GOOD-BY, Frank.” Drake reached carefully down and touched my dwindling shoulder with the tip of his finger. “Be cautious—don’t take too many chances.”

“No.”

“Remember—if he once sees you—well, that’s the end, Frank.”

I called softly upward. “I’ll be careful. You give me the signal, Drake, when you think I’m small enough to start toward him. And remember the plan. If I can distract his attention—if Dianne leaps away—you shoot him.”

I was already not much higher than Drake’s shoe top. The passage floor was in shadow. The wall was drawing away from me.

I had taken what was perhaps half of one of the pellets of the weakest intensity. Its effect was gone in a minute or two. I stood quiet, trying to judge my height compared to Drake; and waiting for his signal to tell me that I was small enough to dare advance into Togaro’s doorway.

A scene of singular strangeness, here on the floor of the shadowed passageway! The floor was a grid, or grill of laced metal. I saw it now as a spread of level surface; girders three feet wide, with others crossing to checker it into squares—three-foot squares, each of them a black abyss. The perpendicular passage wall was fifty feet from me. The other way, I could see Drake’s monstrous figure; it

blurred up into the distance overhead. I gazed, trying to estimate his apparent height. Four hundred feet tall, or more. Beyond him—it seemed a quarter of a mile at least—there was the blur of Ahlma's robe.

I concluded that to Drake I was about an inch high. I saw him move; as though some great dark mountain were falling upon me, his body stooped above me. His hand came slowly down; his palm spread like a pink-white roof close over my head. And then swooped upward; I could feel the suction-wind as it rose.

It was our agreed-upon signal. With my heart pounding I turned toward the cliff which was the passage wall. I walked, half ran upon one of the broad metal girders.

I came to the wall; followed one of the girders going lengthwise of the passage. This huge passage! A vaulted, shadowed place five hundred feet across, and twice as high.

Ahead of me the cliff ended in a great opening. Togaro's doorway! I stopped at the edge of it; stood cautiously peering. I could see into the gigantic room. Togaro's back seemed half turned to me. I could distinguish only his foot and leg. The blur of his body showed in the upper distance; and Dianne up there—a dim golden blur of her robe.

I stood listening. From what seemed hundreds of feet I heard the rumble of Togaro's voice, talking to Dianne. And heard the roaring tumult of the ship.

I took a few more steps. It was several hundred yards into the room to reach where that huge foot touched the floor. Did I dare go in? Could I climb upon that foot—a mound as large as a house? Climb hundreds of feet up the slope of that leg and reach the heights

of his chest and into it plunge my little sword? Vague thoughts, nothing like what I had planned to do!

I STOOD shivering. Fear swept me that this thing I had undertaken was impossible of success. The blurred shape moved—a mountain off there suddenly shifting. The shadows in which I was lurking slid away. Light struck on me. In a panic I scuttled back along the girder.

I stood again trying to figure it; striving to keep my wits. All a question of size. Togaro's hunched back was against the stateroom bed. If I could get safely into the room, get behind him—then I would dare get larger.

But in my present size I could not cross the threshold without the chance of his seeing me. I had nearly an hour; I decided to get smaller.

A taste of the drug. The girder beneath my feet widened until it was a broad, rough metal roadway.

Space above me and to the sides was so great I seemed almost in the open. Ahead in the distance there were dim blurs of shape. And there seemed occasionally the muffled rumble of monstrous voices.

I ran until I was winded, then walked. How far, I have no idea. It seemed, altogether, a mile or more. The roadway ended in a great spread of rough metal surface. I climbed a gentle slope like a mound, passed over it and descended.

The threshold! I was in the room.

I had been advancing toward the mountainous outlines which were Togaro's body. I came near them now. He wore rough cloth trousers. The corrugations of them were tremendous fantastic ridges of gray surface rising into the air.

I stood again trying to fathom just where I was, and what I might do. I was still a considerable distance from where those billowing folds of cloth rested upon this metal ground.

I ran again, then walked to get my wind. I was already tired. The gray mountain was at hand. I think I was behind Togaro. The folds of his trousers rose in an almost formless shape to where, several hundred feet up, I thought might be the line of his belt.

I stood beside his leg. I even touched him. The cloth was like woven strands of rope. Each strand was rough with dangling edges.

I put my hand upon one strand. It was thick as the rope that ties an ocean steamship to its dock. There were spaces here into which my whole arm would go.

I set my foot into an opening. I could climb this! I gripped one of the strands. I swung myself up.

Then realization came to me. Why, this was madness! There was five hundred feet of height above me, and then I would only reach the ledge which was Togaro's belt. All this time his least movement would fling me off, plunge me to my death.

Madness! I let go, and leaped backward to the ground. I would have to get larger.

FAR more time must have elapsed than I realized. I had so often stood lost in awed contemplation, trying to decide what to do. I stood that way now until I brought myself out of it with a muttered imprecation. This would not do! I had forgotten all my careful plans which at the beginning had seemed so reasonable. I would have to be large enough to attack with some degree of success.

Large enough to distract Togaro's attention while Dianne flung herself from his clutch.

I took a cautious taste of the enlarging drug, then another.

The scene around me, with its steady dwindling, began to rationalize. I found myself standing behind Togaro, in the curve between him and the state-room bunk. His waistline came down. I thought that presently with a leap I might reach up and seize his belt. Or in a moment I would be able to climb into the bunk. And from there perhaps leap upon his shoulder.

I had, for a long time past, been aware of various sounds. I had heard Drake's voice in the passage, talking, I thought, with Togaro.

The expanding drug action ceased. I drew my sword. I was now, I think, compared to Togaro, a foot possibly in height. There were sounds—a confusion of them—in the air. Voices, blurred by the mingled throb and hum of the ship.

But abruptly they all changed. A silence. Then new sounds—a clanging, and a sudden voice! Drake's voice:

"Dianne! Togaro! Sit still or I'll kill you—"

I was stricken. Togaro's great body, with Dianne clutched to him, was heaving, rising.

He lurched backward, almost to crush me. Drake shouted again, but his words were lost in the turmoil. It seemed that all the world was crashing about me—rending, tearing crashes.

I leaped upward. My sword dropped as I clutched frantically to keep from falling. I caught at a great leather band, wedged my arm under it and clung.

I felt myself heaved monstrously into the air.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Gravestone

*Lee Bridges, wildcatting
in the Texas oil fields,
faces a deep problem
with wealth as the
prize*

By

JOHN N. PREBLE

THE tool-pusher's decrepit "whooper" hivered to a stop at the curb before the granite-faced Allen County Bank, and Lee Bridges, attired in worn khaki, stiffly got out of the car. In dusty knee-boots, the wild-catter stood well over six feet—lean, muscular, sunburned; a real son of Texas.

Gathered in front of the closed bank was a knot of men, among whom he recognized a well-shooter friend, Steve Hamill; also he saw Myron Drake, sharp-trading cotton buyer and owner of the local gin. To the silent, sullen group of Thompson residents, Drake was delivering a sharp harangue.

"I tell yuh, Pres'dent Morgan has stole up blind," Drake was saying in his squeaky voice. "Betrayed his trust, losin' our money in wuthless oil land. Why, a kid with a lick o' sense would have knowed better!"

The newly-arrived Bridges, his curiosity aroused, edged to Hamill's elbow.

"What's all the commotion?" he asked with concern.

"Bank's broke," explained Steve, a

quiver on his lips. And me with it. Blowed up complete!"

Unable to believe such a calamity had fallen, the oil man scanned the circle of faces, but met only blank, dejected glances. Bank failure! His whole grubstake wiped out! For a moment he was overwhelmed, unable to speak. If his money had been lost due to the failure of the wildcat well he was now digging, he would have considered it part of the game. A wildcatter rather expected that. But to have his cash take wings while in the vaults of a bank which one believed impregnable, was a possibility he had never counted upon.

"Yes, sir," continued the gin owner shrilly. "I'll gamble my socks they don't pay a measly nickel on the dollar."

Bridges pushed among the men. Drake tapped him on the shoulder. "How much did you lose?" asked the cotton man, squinting through his spectacles.

"They got my hull wad—over six thousand," answered the wildcatter with a wry smile.

"Wall, you should have knowed better," whined Drake. "I felt all 'long Morgan was a-comin' to a bad end. Thet's why I swapped my 'ccount to the Farmers' Secur'ty. Reckon yore well is done blowed up now, eh?"

"Not by a jugful!" declared the oil man emphatically. Being a wildcatter, and therefore a world's champion optimist, he wasted no time in vain regrets. "I'm a-goin' to finish drillin' thet hole in spite o' hell an' high water!"

The cotton man wagged his head. "Takes money to drill oil wells," he said scornfully, "and folks are gittin' sick o' financin' dusters."

"Somebody'll have to stake me." He regarded the gin owner seriously. "Looky here, Mister Drake, why don't you th'ow in with me? I'll give you a mighty good share. It's a pretty gamble with a great chance to make a chunk o' big money. You know, I got a slick location out yonder, and we oughter bring in a big gusher. Are you on?"

Drake nervously set his face against the proposal. "No, no," he piped. "I don't want nothin' to do with oil wells. They're too blamed uncertain. I believe in stickin' to cotton."

THE oil man shrugged his broad shoulders. "Waal, if thet don't hit you, then I'll offer you a sound and profit'ble investment." The wildcatter's forefinger tapped Drake on the chest. "I must have five thousand dollars right quick, to pay off my drillin' crew and take care of the future. You take a mortgage on my drillin' rig; I'll pay you good interest."

"No, no," answered the cotton man shrilly, "I couldn't do it—couldn't think of it."

"Lissen here," said Bridges urgent-

ly, "you can't lose. If I don't pay, you'll git the rig."

"No, I prefer to stick to cotton." But Drake regarded the wildcatter cunningly.

For a moment the oil man was silent. Failure of his venture loomed ahead, and a feeling of desperation possessed him; for Drake was the only man in town with spare cash. With the well now down a thousand feet, he refused to give up, for he believed too strongly in its possibilities.

"I'm positive," argued Bridges stubbornly, shaking his finger to emphasize his point, "the well will produce. Tell you what I'll do—if she's a gusher, I'll give you a bonus of twenty-five hundred dollars."

Drake considered the inducement in silence. When he faced the oil man a coldness filled his eyes. "I'll take the mortgage on the rig and well," he said decisively, as though throwing down a challenge. "Sixty days; twenty-five per cent interest! You can take it or leave it; I ain't partic'lar."

Bridges blew out his breath loudly. "Those are mighty stiff terms. "It's a stick-up!" he said, scratching his head. "However, I'll pay it. "Sixty days!" the wildcatter whistled. "Man, I can't do anythin' in thet time. Make it six months anyway."

Drake's countenance was an impenetrable barrier. "Can't do it," he said with compressed lips.

"Give me ninety days at least," urged Bridges. "I must have thet long. You shore can't expect me to complete the job in two short months?"

"Ninety days, then," said Drake, "but if you git oil, thirty-five hundred dollars bonus fer me."

When a man was broke, Bridges realized, he couldn't pick and choose. The man who had the money made the

terms to suit himself. If he refused Drake's highway robbery proposition, the well would very probably have to be abandoned.

"All right," said the wildcatter. "shoot!"

At the Farmer's Security the business was arranged. Bridges put up his oil lease, signed the note, and received Drake's check for five thousand dollars. When the oil man left the bank, Steve Hamill was waiting for him at the door.

"Lee," said the shooter, shaking his head, "you oughta laid offen thet coyote. It's a caution the way he skins these here innocent dirt farmers, and if he gits half a chance, he'll fleece you like a sheep, too."

Bridges laughed. "Don't fret, he won't skin me," he promised. "My hide's too tough."

RAPIDLY the well went down, passing the two thousand-foot depth. Soft formations—mostly gumbo, that the mud pumps ate up quite easily, and smooth-cutting shales—offered little resistance. What little lime rock they found was thin and soon penetrated. Two sands were struck; but both proved dry. However, at two thousand four hundred and seventy feet, a show of gas gladdened Lee Bridges.

Then, with such bright prospects in view, came the fateful mishap. While the rig was being shut down at noon, a cave-in jammed and held the pipe somewhere far below in the hole; the subsequent "fishing" job, the most monotonous and heart-breaking labor known in the oil fields, tried the souls, and ate up much money and valuable time, as they struggled to free the drill.

Day after day, they pulled, jerked, tugged—till the strain overtaxed the

drill pipe and it snapped in two. With overshot and spear, they went back in the hole and fished. Eventually the connection was made again with the "fish," and the pulling and straining continued till once more the pipe parted.

The wildcatter's cash ran low, but half the men stood by him. So that he might carry on, they drew their wages in stock instead of cash and gambled with him. Cut down to one crew, Bridges struggled along, running only a daylight shift.

One day, lost in thought, Bridges leaned in the doorway of the tool-house. With stoic patience, most necessary for the wildcatter, he watched Dunham, his driller, at the brake. Throttle wide open, the draw-works strained till the derrick creaked and squatted, and the engine stalled on dead center. But the pipe would not budge. The driller slacked off and repeated the tedious, nerve-racking routine.

Lee crossed the derrick floor to Dunham's side. "I reckon the jacks are the only salvation," he said. "Pete oughter be here with 'em any minute."

"If they don't work, nothin' will," replied the driller, "'cause we done tried ever'thin' else."

From the mesquite a quarter hour later emerged the clattering "whoop-pee," with one of the roughnecks at the wheel. It jolted over the deep chuck holes and swung up to the derrick.

After rounding up the crew, the wildcatter supervised the unloading of the heavy hydraulic jacks, and had them set up against the pipe. When ready, the men pumped them up with long levers; the strain on the pipe grew greater and greater. Inch by inch it stretched. Would the pipe stand it? The even, gradual pull was at least a big aid; the drill stem could thus with-

stand a greater strain than by the sudden, jerking pull of the engine.

Bridges prayed that what held the pipe would release its powerful grip before the pipe was pulled again in two. For if the jacks failed there was nothing else to try—the hole would have to be junked, given up.

"Be ready to jump," cautioned Lee, knowing that if the pipe snapped, the jacks would leap up and fall dangerously. Any one caught under them would be seriously crushed, if not killed.

Another inch gained. Again they waited.

Equal to a hundred tons, the stress on the pipe was terrific. It seemed impossible that a four-inch steel pipe could withstand such strain. The men's eyes were fastened on the pipe, and as they watched, the stem appeared to rise slowly.

"She's comin'!" cried Dunham. "All thet couldn't be stretch."

"Yo're right! She pumps easier," said Lee.

Dunham jumped to the throttle, and throwing in the clutch, pulled on the tools. Slowly at first, catching and dragging, then faster the pipe gradually was pulled up. By seven that night, the "fish," muddy and grim, was entirely above ground, and after the rig was shut down the crew, over beans and bacon in the cook shack, congratulated each other.

But Drake's note was due in a week, and as there was no possibility of completing the well in less than a month, the wildcatter drove to Thompson the next morning, to induce Drake to extend the mortgage.

He found the gin owner a hard man to do business with. Drake finally said he would allow Bridges to drill sixty days longer. But when the

oil man asked him to put it in black and white, he stubbornly refused.

The wildcatter argued with him, offering to pay him well for a signed extension of the mortgage, but Drake was inflexible, and Bridges, figuring that the cotton man would call for his money if pushed too hard, decided to say no more.

BRIDGES sat smoking on the lazy bench, his back against a trembling derrick leg. It was a balmy afternoon; a gentle breeze from the southwest faintly smelling of sage fanned his cheek. Unconsciously, he listened to the grind and clank of the rotary, the *pup-pup* of the engine and the forceful *chow! chow! chow!* of the laboring mud pump. Above, the hose through which the mud was forced into the "kelly," and thence down through the pipe to the bottom, pulsed like a huge, aroused reptile.

Dunham at the brake eased the tools down as the bit ate its way into the earth's depths. "Slim," the derrick man, was oiling the machinery, and the roughnecks were cleaning out the ditch, where the flow of mud from the hole deposited the cuttings.

Bridges, though happy that they were making hole so fast, was beginning to feel some anxiety for the success of his venture. The bit was now grinding in shale at two thousand, seven hundred feet, and the next three hundred feet would spell either success or failure.

To the oil man this infernal clatter, the mingling of many clangorous noises into a crude medley was sweet music; and as his trained ear unconsciously listened, a change in the quality of the din was telegraphed to his brain. Far below the bit which had been grinding evenly, struck a forma-

tion offering resistance; the rotary became tumultuous, bucking, crashing, fighting a force which sought to conquer it.

Dunham bore down heavily on the brake rod. Looking toward his boss, his lips formed the words, "Lime rock."

Bridges nodded. He too recognized the new formation as hard lime, and speculated on the possibility of it being the caprock under which lay pay dirt.

For half an hour the rotary crashed and strained, fighting to drive the bit through. Suddenly there came another change. A final wrench, and the machinery ground smoothly. The oil man cocked his ear. The mud pump had picked up, quickened of its own accord; and the bit rapidly made hole, a foot in seconds. Significant glances passed between the men.

Dunham pulled the tools off bottom and shut down the engine, but the mud pump continued to force the mud below. From the top it boiled, a cocoa-colored stream.

"Sand!" exclaimed the driller.

"Showin' gas, too," added Bridges with excitement in his voice. "Man, I hope it's the dope this time!"

Dunham procured a strainer, and sank it in the mud stream to catch a sample of the cuttings from the bottom. Soon he pulled it out, and washed the bits of formation with clear water. The wildcatter dipped in for a wet handful. Carefully, he picked over the small fragments; tiny pieces of blue shale, pieces of whitish lime rock, and—Bridges's hand shook as he picked up a particle that resembled brown sugar! He slipped it onto his finger nail, and placed it on the tip of his tongue. Unmistakably there was a distinct oily taste.

"Boys," he said rather huskily,

"we've got it! She's richer than bull gravy."

With the aid of a core barrel, four hours later they had before them a large sample of oil sand. Without a question it was exceedingly rich, and would, Bridges knew, produce a good well. Up through two thousand, seven hundred feet of mud the gas continued to boil, forming a black foam, strong with the sweet odor of natural gas.

In the cook shack that night, the crew was in a boisterous humor. With the promise of big profits by selling their stock, they planned the purchase of automobiles and snappy clothes, and talked of a blow-out in the city. Bridges smoked contentedly in a corner, happy that his goal was so nearly reached.

Not for a moment did he dream that forces were already at work to deprive him of his hard-earned fortune.

BRIDGES arrived in Thompson at midday to purchase steel casing for his well. Before it could be brought in, steel pipe must be set in the hole for the oil to flow through. As he parked the whoopee, Steve Hamill came toward him.

The wildcatter met his friend with a broad, happy grin, and slapped him soundly on the back. "Howdy, Steve!" he exclaimed.

"Say, I'm pow'ful sorry," sympathized Steve, "you shore had a tough break!"

Lee regarded him peculiarly.

"Tough break nothin'!" he said enthusiastically. Muffling his voice, he whispered: "Boy, we got a well! The wildcat's done tamed, and I don't mean p'rhaps!"

But Hamill didn't warm up to his pal's enthusiasm. "I reckon you ain't heerd—" he began, and then hesitated

a moment. "Say ain't you read the papers?"

"Read what?" demanded the oil man, his brows knitted. "You shore talk like you was plumb full o' trouble."

"Drake's handin' you a package," burst out Steve. "He's foreclosin'!"

"Foreclosin'?" said Lee, amazed. "But he give me his word—"

"Shore he did. But his word ain't wuth a damn!"

Bridges clutched the well-shooter by the arm. "I got a well—a big one. Savvy?" His eyes flashed. "By next week I'll have 'nough dough to pay him off a thousand times over, an' then some."

"They won't be no next week," groaned Steve. "You've done lost ever'thin' but yore birthday."

"The old buzzard!" muttered the wilcatter. "I'll smoke him out, and shove a gun down his lyin' throat." He started off, but Steve called him back.

"You won't find him," he explained. "Him and the sheriff left for the well jest 'fore you got here. Wouldn't do you no good no way. He's got you sewed up tighter'n a jug."

Bridges grew hot with anger. In a flash he realized why Drake would not extend the mortgage. Somehow the gin owner had learned of the strike, and planned to wipe him out before he had time to protect himself.

During his varied career, he had learned how rough Dame Fortune could be, but this was the toughest luck he had ever experienced. A big fortune perhaps a million or two, was almost within his grasp, yet while he stood helplessly by, it was being stolen from him by the lying usurer.

Clenching his fists, a fiery resolution burned in his brain. "I'll plug him," he thought with venom; "he'll never

live to enjoy the winnin's!" But then, remembrance of advice from his father, an old-timer in the West, had a sobering effect: "Son, don't use yore gun 'cept when absolutely necessary—use yore brains. Remember, a smart gent don't outshoot his enemies; he outwits 'em." The tension left his body, and the hot blood cooled in his veins.

Bridges leaned back against an electric pole, and as his mind groped for some quick way to pay off Drake, his eyes raised to the blue sky above the piles of brick and granite. Into the range of his vision soared an airplane from the city's airport; it circled and banked against the soft clouds for a moment, and then was lost to view. Up there, thought Lee, was the free, happy realm, far above the drudgery and meanness of earth.

HIS gaze lowered to the Allen County Bank across the street, and he thought with an emptiness in his heart how easy his success would have been if his grub-stake had not been lost. As he regarded the granite façade of the building an idea was suddenly born in his brain. For an instant he stood transfixed, for the plan was so good, it startled him.

"Steve!" he almost shouted, "Steve, where can I git a gravestone?"

"Gravestone?" Bewildered, the well-shooter regarded his friend. Was he joking? Or crazy?

"Hurry, Steve!" urged the wildcatter. "Gravestone—a hunk o' granite!"

"Huh? Granite—gravestone—why, old man Deane cuts 'em," answered the shooter. "Burnett Street, near Twelfth." Steve turned and regarded him strangely. "Say, what you fixin' to do? Goin' to bury somebody, or commit suicide?"

But Bridges did not stop to answer. He jumped into the car, which leaped forward like a spurred animal through the slow traffic and past frightened jay walkers.

He swerved dangerously around the corner into Burnett Street as the railroad gates were being lowered, and just succeeded in sliding safely under them. The car careened drunkenly past intersecting streets, until as Twelfth Street was approached a thick array of tombstones appeared on the right. Lee jerked the machine to the curb and leaped out.

Over the entrance to the lot was a wooden arch, bearing the blurred words: "Monumental Works, James Deane, Prop." Bent over a granite block, an old man, bareheaded and garbed in dusty overalls, was pounding away with mallet and chisel. Bridges ran over to him.

"I want a granite post eight inches in diameter, 'bout this long." The oil man held up his hands, "two, three feet."

Old man Deane tilted back his head and looked up at him. Blinking his eyes through screened glasses, he said: "Guess I ain't got jest what ye want, but I'll cut ye one. Ye can git it in the morn—"

"No," cut in Bridges sharply, "got to have it right quick." He searched about the yard. His roving eyes lighted on a particular slab of stone, and he strode toward it. "Here," he called, hurriedly measuring it with his hand, "jest the right thickness. Cut me a chunk, quick!"

While the old man drilled, the wildcatter paced back and forth nervously. It seemed to him as though the ancient stone-cutter's hands were tied, weighted with lead. Bridges had to restrain himself from snatching up a

sledge hammer and dealing the drill a violent blow.

How near to the well, he wondered, were Drake and the sheriff? Could he possibly beat them? He consulted his watch and realized that they had been on the road over half an hour, and that it would be impossible to overtake them in his whoopee. In an airplane he might stand a chance.

"Thar ye be," said the old man.

Bridges shoved a bill in his hand, and swinging up the granite, ran for his machine.

In ten minutes of fast driving he arrived at the airport, south of the city, and as soon as he was able to get plane and pilot, he was soaring northwest at a hundred miles an hour. In the cockpit at his feet lay the priceless granite post.

Leaning out, he looked down; the strong current of air streaking past beat heavily against his head. Like an engraved map, the country lay two thousand feet below. Along the road to Carter, a grayish brown thread, he searched, and wondered anxiously where Drake and the sheriff were. They had now been on the road almost an hour, so they must have covered over half the distance; however, with luck in landing, the wildcatter might just beat them to the well.

If he didn't, the fortune for which he had labored so hard and which was rightly his, would be taken from him. He wouldn't have a shoestring left, and his plucky, loyal crew would lose everything.

BRIDGES again glanced down. To the north lay the little town of Carter, sleeping peacefully on the expanse of prairie. From the railroad station crawled the afternoon train, a small black caterpillar. Ahead, he

made out the derrick of his well. He shouted to the pilot, but his voice was lost in the roar of the engine and rush of wind. Then he poked him in the back, and pointed downward.

Swiftly they went into a dive, and spiralled down. The ground rushed up to meet them. At three hundred feet the plane straightened out, while the pilot searched for a place to alight. Coming back into the wind two hundred yards from the well, he landed prettily on the rolling ground. Bridges searched about with anxiety, and his heart leaped when he realized that the sheriff's car had not yet arrived. Like an ungainly bird, the plane taxied up close to the derrick.

"Keep her turnin' over!" Lee shouted to the pilot.

Dunham and some of the boys ran out from the bunk-house as Bridges dropped the granite post to the ground. He must hurry; for to be caught at the well by Drake would be fatal to his plan. Jumping down, he swung the post to his shoulder and ran for the derrick floor. At any moment he expected to see the sheriff's machine emerge from the mesquite.

Kicking off the wooden cover to the hole, he poised the granite post over the well; then with a prayer released it. With a rush it fell, whistling weirdly through the surface casing. Fifty feet below it struck the muddy water with a terrific report that echoed loudly from the steel pipe, and sank silently to the bottom of the hole a half mile down.

Dunham rushed over. "What the devil?" he cried out. Behind him the crew stood with mouths open, staring at their boss as though he had gone insane.

"Boys, I hated to do it," explained the wildcatter, "but it's our only shot."

8 A

"Say, you done played hell—what's the big idea?" demanded the driller bewildered, as though he half thought the boss was double crossing them.

Bridges talked rapidly. "Drake's foreclosin'; get me? Him and the sheriff 'll be here any minute. Drake's heerd we got oil and he figgers on freezin' us out an' bringin' in a well all by hisse'f."

"Yeah?" snorted Dunham. "But why did you heave down thet stone?"

Lee winked humorously. "When Drake hits thet there granite," he explained with a grin, "he'll quit. Savvy? Nobody don't ever hunt for oil under granite, do they?"

"Waal, I'll be dad-blamed!" exclaimed Dunham.

"I reckon you all will be fired, boys. But if you can, make the ol' coyote pay off," advised the wildcatter, "and play possum—keep this dope under yore muddy hats."

With a leap, Bridges climbed into the plane. The pilot swung the machine about and opened the throttle. Lee waved a farewell to the crew. Drunk-enly, the plane lurched over the prairie floor, gathering momentum. A roar, a rush of wind; the tail raised, and they zoomed aloft. The biplane banked, straightened, and set its nose toward Thompson.

Bridges, thrusting out his head, saw a dark dot on the section line a mile from the well, moving rapidly before a trailing cloud of dust. Without question it was the foreclosure party. He had just succeeded in beating them by minutes.

He settled back in the cockpit contented with his victory. A grin spread over his features and he chuckled easily to himself. The oil man felt positive that Drake's driller would believe that all sedimentary formation

had been passed, and that the bit was actually in a granite formation, below which oil is never found.

AFTER old Drake disposed of Bridges and fired the crew without a sent of back pay, he put on his own crew at the well, and boasted that he would bring in the greatest gusher in seven counties. But his triumph was short-lived. Hardly had the drill started its rhythmic movement when his driller informed him that the formation on bottom was not oil sand, but granite. "Nobody never yet found oil under granite," the well-driller said glumly. "Ye might as well abandon the hole.

Drake became a very sick man; and his neighbors, with whom the close-fisted money-lender was far from popular, dubbed the well "Drake's quarry," and all Thompson laughed at the disillusioned cotton man.

Bridges's drilling contract, which Drake foreclosed and took over, specified that if drilling ceased for a period of thirty days, the contract should be null and void. It was, consequently, little more than a month after Drake painfully quit work and hauled off the machinery, that he lost his entire claim to the well. Drake's quarry stood idle, a hole in the ground.

During this month Bridges had been secretly making arrangements with out-of-town bankers to re-finance his operations. As he now had a gilt-edged proposition to offer, it was not

difficult to get backing from those who had confidence in him.

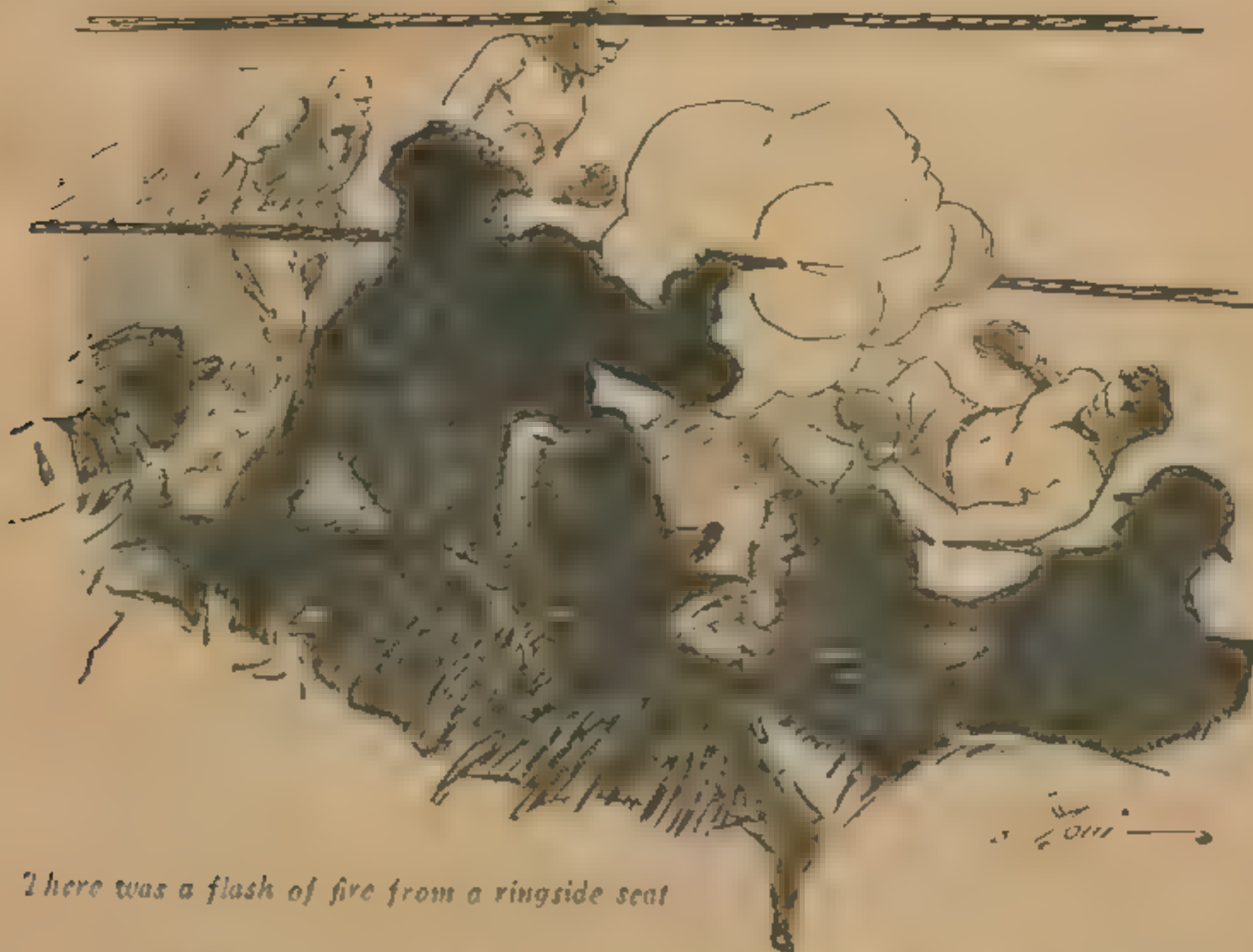
Folks were curiously surprised, shortly after the cotton man lost his "whole right and interest," to learn that Bridges was leasing again from the farmers the acreage around the condemned hole. The land-owners were almost sorry to take the money from the "crazy wildcatter"; they couldn't understand him.

But when Bridges and his loyal crew, headed by Dunham, proceeded to fish out the granite post, there was a different story. For they brought in what became known the country over as the Gravestone Gusher. The entire section went wild with excitement. Gravestone, after the pipe-line was hooked up, gauged in one week a flow of forty-four thousand barrels of crude, and Bridges, besieged by the big oil companies, finally sold out for two and a quarter million, of which his faithful drill crew got a good share.

After he had made the strike, Bridges paid off the note he had given the cotton man, though he might have claimed it was covered by the rig Drake seized. But Myron Drake seemed strangely ungrateful. He shunned the public, and failed rapidly in health, although there was nothing visibly wrong with him. At length he sent for his lawyer, to draw up his will; and in the strangest terms, he specified that his grave be marked with a slab of marble, or limestone—anything but granite.

THE END.





There was a flash of fire from a ringside seat

The Mental Marvel

Hounded by underworld killers, brilliant young Roger Thule battles his way toward the heavyweight belt and the secret of his father's murder

By FRED MACISAAC

Author of "Blood on the Snow," "The Spectral Passenger," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ROGER THULE, twenty-one year-old mental prodigy, exploited by his father, Theobald Thule, as a child lightning calculator, has studied everything, obtained degrees, and—has tired of life. To interest the ill-balanced youth, Dr. Tom Marvin, mind specialist, bets him one hundred thousand dollars that he cannot fulfill two of his boasts—that he can beat the champion heavyweight, and win any girl he wants. Dr. Marvin picks Eloise

Lane, an actress protégée of his; and Steve Haverty, "the Abysmal Brute," the champion, is her admirer. If Roger loses, the money goes to Eloise.

Roger is strong, and an amateur boxer of promise. He trains with "Professor" Whiz Malone, and astonishes him in his early fights by outguessing his foes and by his ability to stand blows without feeling them if he knows they are coming. He says it is a Hindu *fakir* accomplishment, such as they use

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when they stick pins through their flesh—a matter of supreme mental concentration. But Roger also has a real fighting heart—caught off guard, he can take punishment and come back gamely. He whips four second-raters, and is matched for a bout with Phil Crowe, championship challenger.

One night Roger's father is found murdered in his study. Roger is at first suspected, though a woman's scented handkerchief in the dead man's chair relieves suspicion. But Roger recognizes the scent as perfume he had made chemically for Eloise, and the shock proves to him that he loves the girl whom he has cold-bloodedly been trying to win. She does not explain how she could have lost the handkerchief.

The settlement of the estate seems to show that Theobald Thule was almost penniless save for the one hundred thousand dollars put up as a wager. Roger, suspicious, checks up on Ransome, the lawyer, when he cannot find any accounts or any trace of his father's supposed million. Clever work leads him to E. H. Mason, a former showman friend of his father and now a Wall Street broker. He deduces the truth—that Mason must have bucketed his father's money, falsifying accounts and keeping the money. Meanwhile Mason, with whom Steve Haverly and his manager Tim Hearn are trustingly investing their money, tries to pump Eloise.

Two attempts are made on Roger's life—one by a gunman, the second by bombing his house. Eloise is suddenly called to Chicago before Roger can question her about a letter in her handwriting, dated the night of Theobald Thule's murder, making an appointment to meet him. Roger, determined to beat Crowe before he attends to Ma-

son, goes into hiding at a secret training camp in Douglas County.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SHOW BUSINESS.

WHEN Jake Fulbert, the promoter, assured Whiz Malone that boxing had turned into show business and the way to draw a crowd was to put on a circus, he only repeated what the late Tex Rickard had discovered several years before when he staged the first "Battle of the Century" between Georges Carpentier and Jack Dempsey. The Frenchman was only a few pounds above the middleweight limit and had never fought a man in the class of the champion of the world. All boxing authorities were agreed that he had as much chance as a jackrabbit with a bulldog; that there wouldn't be a fight at all.

Against that, press agents averred that Carpentier was handsome, that he had a very blond skin, that he had served France faithfully in four years of war, that he was dauntless and as champion of France and England would fight to the last against the savage American champion. They were all good arguments for a theatrical entertainment, though not for a boxing contest. It turned out to be a theatrical entertainment, attended by a hundred thousand people and turning in a million and a half gate.

Mr. Rickard staged other theatrical entertainments after that: Dempsey's go with the Mad Bull of the Pampas, Firpo, and his two affrays with Gene Tunney, all possessing every element of theatrical exploitation.

On the afternoon of July 10, the last piece of pasteboard for the fight at Ebbet's Field between Roger Thule and

Phil Crowe passed into the hands of a purchaser. Fifty thousand spectators—three hundred and thirty thousand dollars in the box office—and Jake Fulbert was tearing his hair because he hadn't charged twice as much for his seats.

Popular interest in the battle between Brains and Brawn had been ingeniously aroused and skillfully nursed until it reached white heat upon the day of the fight. The meeting of the two men had an irresistible appeal, not only for the thoughtless, but for the boxing connoisseurs.

The wiser fight fans, the canny sporting writers, the hard-boiled managers, the gamblers and the sophisticated hangers-on of the game were sure that Roger Thule would be lucky to last one round against the mighty Phil Crowe.

They knew that his little basket of tricks would not avail him much against a first-class tornado like Phil, and for weeks they had been telling all and sundry that there was nothing to it; yet wild horses could not have kept them away from the ball park. It was something you knew all about, but you had to see, as one wisenheimer, who gave up fifteen dollars for a ringside seat, expressed it.

ROGER had stated to Fulbert that at present he was a freak in the public mind, something weird and marvelous and worth seeing; and the event had proved him right. In the multitude of fifty thousand ticket-holders were thirty or forty people who were not fight fans in the ordinary sense and knew little about the boxing game, but who had been drawn in by the ballyhoo. This was what the promoter had hoped might happen, but what particularly amused him was that

his net had drawn in all the wise ones, too.

With the aid of the encyclopædias and works of popular science, Mr. Fulbert's press agents had concocted fight propaganda of new and picturesque character. They dripped polysyllabic words; psychological reactions, coordinations, autosuggestion, psychoanalysis, anatomical efficiency, and other expressions which had no business in pugilism.

They published preposterous anecdotes of Roger's acumen as a child and even more preposterous yarns of how he had befuddled and scientifically demolished his four ring opponents. No matter how fantastic the statements made regarding these fights, the opponents of the Marvel hastened to corroborate them while Maloney of Jersey stuck stoutly to his story that Roger, after having been soundly beaten by him in the first round, made himself invisible, and won the fight in that way.

And from the training camp in Douglas County came tales that aided to whet public interest. The Brain Champion worked in a practice ring which was marked off like a checkerboard. He had a Japanese masseur whose work was done behind closed doors. He had an automatic sparring partner, a stuffed dummy which moved about the ring by some sort of clockwork and righted itself every time it was knocked down by the boxer. He had a book of life-size charts of the human body and would explain the gruesome things to any of his visitors who could stand to look at human internal organs. Understanding anatomy as he did, he had found three or four more vulnerable spots on the body where a knock-out punch could be delivered.

When asked to point out these vulnerable spots he laughed and said he would demonstrate them on Phil Crowe.

A discharged sparring partner accused him of having his body filled with electricity which knocked a man down when touched by the fist of the scientist and this tale was widely published and received wide credence among the public. The real facts in this case were as follows:

Roger had gone three rounds each with two sparring partners and Whiz sent into the ring the third, one Dick Feurst, a hulking third-rater who occasionally patronized the Malone gymnasium in New York City.

Roger had boxed with the fellow several times, but upon this occasion he had been attracted by his manner, threw a penetrating glance at him and shouted for Whiz.

"I've had enough; no more boxing to-day," he said loudly. "Whiz, get that fellow's gloves. There is mischief in his eye."

Whiz swooped upon Feurst as he was secreting the gloves and found a half pound of lead in the right glove. The little manager personally beat up the scoundrel and drove him out of the camp. In supposed revenge he concocted the electricity yarn.

This was the only move against Roger which might have been made by Mason during his period of training. Apparently the fact that the young man had settled down to train for his battle with Crowe had reassured Mason regarding his intentions toward himself, or else the defensive cordon around the training camp thwarted other murderous efforts. Roger was not even sure that Feurst's treachery was inspired by Mason. He might have been an emissary of the other training camp; in any

event the crook had an imagination and unwittingly helped the ticket sale.

THE main bout was scheduled to go on between nine and ten in the evening, depending upon whether the preliminary contests ended abruptly by knockouts or went the limit.

At three in the afternoon, Roger Thule and Phil Crowe met for the first time, the place being the New York office of Jake Fulbert, the purpose, to weigh in.

Crowe was in the West when his manager signed the fight articles and so had missed his chance to inspect the young man known as the Mental Marvel. It was unfortunate for him that he had no mental picture of Roger Thule to set against the preposterous stories which drifted down to his training camp and reached his ears despite the effort of Marty Green, his manager.

Phil was sitting in a straight back chair in a corner of the office while Marty went over the box office advance sale reports with the promoter when Whiz Malone and Roger Thule entered. Jake almost knocked over a table in his eagerness to shake the hand of the young pugilist. While, in his opinion, Phil Crowe was the great fighter, it was the Mental Marvel who had drawn a three hundred and fifty thousand dollar gate.

"Guess you boys haven't met," said Fulbert. "Phil, this is Roger Thule. Roger, mitt Phil Crowe."

Crowe was a blond young man of twenty-six or so, long of arms and legs, broad shouldered, and physically splendid. His yellow hair was parted in the middle and grew low upon a broad forehead. He had overhanging brows and small deep-set blue eyes, a snub nose, a long upper lip, a grim mouth

and a heavy chin. He looked like a Scandinavian lumberjack from the the Michigan woods and from those woods he had come three or four years ago to burn up the heavyweight division.

He got on his feet as Roger advanced toward him with outstretched hand, and his heavy lids lifted as he stared curiously at his opponent. His hand went out mechanically, for he was studying Roger's handsome high-bred face, and after several seconds he drew a deep breath then expelled it in a contemptuous "Huh!"

"Delighted to make your acquaintance," said Roger.

"Sure," Crowe said in a heavy bass rumble. "Me, too, mister, you don't look so much. I been hearin' a lot o' bunk about you."

"All I have heard of you has been very complimentary," replied Roger.

"Sure. I've done pretty good. I'm not afraid of you, feller, and you try any funny biz on me to-night—"

"Snap out of it, Phil," commanded his manager. "Treat a gent like a gent."

Phil Crowe grinned, revealing a lot of bridgework which would undoubtedly be taken out of harm's way before the fight. "I'm only warnin' him," he apologized. "But I can tell this guy's all right. We been listenin' to a lot of bunk."

"If it wasn't for what you call the bunk," said Fulbert tartly, "you'd be fighting for ten thousand dollars to-night, Phil, instead of something like ninety grand. Remember that, my boy, and don't try to wind the fight up in a round."

Crowe laughed. "I'll let him stay a round or two, but he's got to behave."

"Look here, Mr. Crowe," said Roger hotly, "I bet you my stake to-night

against yours that you don't knock me out in a round, or two, or five!"

"Nix! Nix," Managers Marty Green and Whiz Malone quickly vetoed this suggestion with delightful harmony.

"Come, come, weigh in," commanded Fulbert. Roger weighed one hundred and eighty-seven and one-half pounds and Phil Crowe weighed one hundred and eighty-nine.

"What do you think of him?" demanded Whiz when the pair were in a taxi on the way to their hotel.

"I think he has been worrying a lot," said Roger. "He is as nervous as a cat. He expected me to have horns and a tail and his outburst was due to relief that I wasn't as terrible as he supposed."

"I saw three of his fights," Whiz declared. "The boy is there. He's faster than Rosenbaum, packs a big wallop and it's impossible to hurt him. You won't be able to keep away from him and you can't stand up to him. I give you three rounds, honest, doc."

"Yet you admit that I can hit very much harder than I could three months ago and you have marveled at the development of my legs, and neither you nor anybody at camp can lay a glove on me when I don't want it to touch me."

"Oh, you're good, but this feller is elegant. Haven't you got any nerves at all, doc?"

"Yes," admitted Roger. "I am full of pleasurable anticipation. I have never been so thrilled in my life."

Whiz patted the big biceps of Roger's right arm. "You sure have a great disposition. And Phil was worried all right, only he probably thinks now that everything he heard was so much boloney and he'll tear in at you as though he was up against a palooka."

"If he does," said the Mental Marvel, "he will speedily regret it."

CHAPTER XXIV.

INTO THE RING.

A PRIZE fight in the open air is always more picturesque than a battle within an inclosure, and the presence of pure atmosphere is an advantage both to contestants and spectators. The ball park was dimly lighted—it was constructed for daylight rather than evening festivities; there was great confusion in seating the multitude which began to storm its entrances about eight thirty, and upon the field where many thousand chairs had been placed the confusion was greatest.

The ring had been set up between the pitcher's box and second base, and overhead lights threw upon it a radiance brilliant in contrast to the rest of the inclosure. In the ring a pair of unknowns were industriously pummeling each other without attracting the slightest attention from those who were assembling to see the destruction of the Mental Marvel.

Roger sat in his dressing room trying to make himself deaf to the chatter of the well-meaning Whiz Malone and Dick Grogan who would be in his corner. Roger had worked out his own plan of battle and it was as different from that Whiz was outlining to him as flying from diving.

Roger had come along marvelously during his training period but, in the opinion of Whiz, he was still far from being the equal of Phil Crowe. He was urging that his fighter use all his skill to keep away from Phil for three or four rounds and thus avoid an early knockout. Whiz considered this evening as the climax and also the finish of the

doc's ring career. They would carry away a hundred thousand dollars as their share and all they had to do was to prevent the contest from being too much of a massacre.

As he sat on his cot with half-closed eyes, Roger was wondering if Haverty would be there and if the destruction of Phil Crowe would frighten the champion from giving him a match. He wondered if Eloise would be present with Haverty. She had written from Chicago that her show was closing and she wished to attend the match. Roger had asked her not to come, but he was afraid she might not pay attention to his wishes.

He didn't want Eloise to see him stripped in the ring, gory perhaps, bruised and battered. Even now he was so ignorant of the true instincts of a woman that he supposed he would appear repulsive to her.

SEMI-FINAL is on," said Jake Fulbert, sticking his head in the door. "How's your nerve, Roger?"

"I'm quite all right," smiled the pugilist.

"Just so long as he gets into the ring and puts up his dukes," the promoter said to Whiz. "After that we're safe. I've been talking to Marty Green, Whiz. If Roger is willing to box for a few rounds, Phil will carry him. He wants it to look like a fight. We don't want this to smell too bad."

"I been telling him to keep away for a couple of rounds anyway," Whiz said in an aggrieved tone. "Maybe he'll pay some attention to you. What's the gate, Jake?"

"Three hundred and forty-eight thousand," said Fulbert in an awed tone. "And it's ours as soon as Roger gets into the ring. Even if he goes out

on the first punch it's our legally, but there might be a riot. I didn't know there were so many suckers in the world."

Roger had to laugh. "It's lucky I'm not a coward," he declared, "or you two would have me crawling under the grandstand to get away from Crowe. Get out of here, both of you. I want to think."

Fulbert looked dubiously at Whiz who nodded glumly, and gave the high sign to Grogan. The three left the dressing room. Roger lay down on the cot and relaxed. The promoter was petrified with fear, he saw that. Most likely he had spent every dollar he had in the world in putting on this show and the failure of the Mental Marvel to appear would ruin him.

He could hear the murmur of the multitude, occasional sharp cries as one or the other of the semi-final boxers scored, and he could hear the gong which marked the end and beginning of the rounds. He discovered that he was beginning to tremble and he calmed his nerves by a method invented two thousand years ago by a Hindu *fakir*.

"Time to go in, Roger," Whiz shouted from outside.

The boy swung his feet out upon the floor and stretched. "Very good, Whiz," he replied. "Ready when you are."

In came his seconds who pushed him into his bathrobe. He had been lying clad only in his trunks for it was a hot, muggy night. Then he was conducted by an underground passage out through the baseball players' pit and upon the field. The nearest spectators caught sight of him and emitted a roar which swelled to terrifying proportions as he moved down a narrow aisle into the section erroneously styled "Ring-

side," though they extended a hundred and fifty feet from the ring.

He climbed through the ropes while pandemonium broke loose and coolly inspected the arena. As far as the eye could see there were people packed like sardines, people sitting in semi-darkness, people by the tens of thousands; and all of them seemed to be yelling.

He began to pick phrases out of the din and realized that this crowd was not cheering him, it was razzing him. In the contest of brains against brawn, the mob was very much for brawn. Several thousand leather-lunged brutes were trying to tell him what Phil Crowe was about to do to him. They were savage about it and sometimes funny, but the humor escaped Roger Thule.

If they had known it, there was no man alive less likely to be affected by a hostile mob, no man who was so gifted in concentrating upon the business before him. Roger knew mob psychology and had taken it for granted that the crowd would be with the fighter against the man of science. He was not distressed, but contemptuous, as he sat there. He sat for five minutes before Phil Crowe came across the field accompanied by applause that was thunderous.

"It would serve them right," Roger thought, "if I dove to the canvas at the first punch. No, most likely they would think they had received their money's worth to see science go out so quickly."

THE referee, Barney Madden, was in the ring now, and who but Steve Haverty was climbing through the ropes! Now the roar of the crowd was tremendous; the champion was very popular. Steve went

first to Phil Crowe and patted him on the shoulder, then he came to Roger, grinned good-naturedly and thrust out his hand.

"Think of you in this ring, Mr. Thule," he said. "You're up against a tough boy, but there's somebody outside pulling for you. Eloise Lane is here."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Roger.

"I didn't want to bring her. I hate women at a fight, but she made me do it."

"Will you take her away if it's a mussy fight?"

Steve laughed. "I'll try."

They spoke in very low tones because thousands were eager to hear what the champion had to say to the Mental Marvel. Then the referee went through the formality of introducing the champion of the world. When the applause died out Steve held up his hand for silence.

"Much obliged," he said in his jerky fashion. "Just want to say that the man that wins this fight will be good enough to meet the champion, and the champion is willing. That's me, Steve Haverty."

"Phil Crowe!" shouted a man with a fog horn voice. Thousands of voices picked it up and told Steve who would be his next opponent. Crowe leaned on the ropes in his corner and grinned contentedly.

And now the ring was cleared. The newspaper photographers had snapped the fighters, the champion, the referee and other notables and it was time for business to begin. The announcer unnecessarily stated that it was a fifteen-round contest under Marquis of Queensberry rules. While he talked Roger discovered Eloise in the fourth row sitting between Steve Haverty and

Tim Hearn. She waved her hand at him encouragingly.

The lights were turned on full, the men were called to the center of the ring for final instruction and touched gloves. Roger returned to his corner and stripped, and a murmur of astonishment went up. These people who had bought tickets to see a prize fight were astounded to discover that one of the fighters was a big strong fellow. They must have known he could not be a weakling, but they had expected a curious physique.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BATTLE.

CLANG went the bell. The gladiators moved swiftly to the meeting and the crowd noted that the Marvel advanced confidently and easily, and that it was Phil Crowe who was bouncing up and down, bobbing, weaving and circling.

Like a darting rattlesnake, Crowe's right arm shot at Roger's jaw and Roger avoided it by a slight bend of the head to the left, a movement that started with the punch, while a right hook landed with a thud on Phil's ribs and the crowd howled in surprise.

Crowe drew off and began circling on tiptoes like a great tawny panther. Roger turned slowly, facing him, alert but at ease. In his contemplation of this contest he had assumed that Crowe was quite as strong and clever as was reputed and might be unhurt by his blows, in which case the contest would go the full fifteen rounds. He had charted his practice ring and studied it for economy of effort while he had computed that ninety per cent of the energy spent in a boxing contest is dissipated uselessly.

Crowe, he saw, was a bundle of nervous energy without the least idea of conserving his resources. He was capering now, darting in and out, bobbing, bouncing and occasionally thrusting with left and right. Roger read his intentions clearly in his eyes and blocked and evaded the preliminary barrage of blows with ease.

Aware that the pair were experimenting with each other, trying their respective metal, the audience was silent for the most part, though a man on the upper level of seats kept up a steady stream of vituperation at the Mental Marvel.

Crowe was dancing in and out and Roger saw that he was coming to the conclusion that he was up against a good boxer, nothing more. He began to creep in, flat-footed, to grasp an opening and let go with his man-killing right, swaying from the hips with intent to confuse, and Roger determined to take the blow on the stomach for the sake of getting him off guard and off balance. He called upon his astonishing muscular control, guarded clumsily against a left feint exposing his body and the right of Phil Crowe hooked into it. It came with such force that it would have finished a battle against anybody else.

Roger had constructed partial immunity against it, but he hadn't counted upon its sheer battering effect—the push of it. Crowe threw himself completely off balance by the blow; he was a free target for a few seconds, but Roger went flying backward and landed upon the canvas in a sitting posture, a look of astonishment upon his face.

From the multitude went up a bellow of barbarous joy. The referee motioned Crowe to the farthest corner and the time-keeper began his count, Roger was surprised, however, not hurt, and

his head was as clear as a bell. This was no opponent to permit to land upon the body; the punch had the kick of a mule. Probably nobody in the audience, not even Whiz, expected him to get up. Crowe thought the fight was over. He was grinning widely.

The count reached seven, then eight, and Roger scrambled to his feet and threw himself into a position of defense. There was a gasp from the multitude and then a cheer which burst spontaneously from thirty thousand throats; just like the cheer which had broken forth some years before when Firpo, after being smashed to the ground seven times in succession by the terrible Dempsey, sprang up and with one furious swipe sent Dempsey, the killer, flying out of the ring. It was a testimonial from a savage mob to the courage of a man it had assumed was all head and no nerve.

CROWE'S seconds, however, were practical, not chivalrous.

"You've got him. Finish him! Finish him!" they yelled. The big man came tearing in wide open, contemptuous of a man who he supposed was tottering from the hardest blow he had ever struck.

"Keep away, keep away!" screamed Whiz, almost beside himself with alarm. Roger stood in a curious position, right knee bent a little, left foot at right angles to his right, right glove extended, left against his chest, the pose of a left-handed fighter. Then as Crowe bore down Thule's body was driven forward on the left leg, head guarded by the left glove, right arm extended full length; the position of a fencer who had thrust with a foil, and the right glove embedded itself in the base of the throat of the charging mammoth.

The speed of the thrust defied any attempt at defense, the rush of Crowe quadrupled the force of the blow, and it had landed upon the most sensitive spot upon the human body above the belt, a spot, by the way, which is rarely hit because it is usually protected by the bent head of the fighter. It brought Crowe up standing; his arms fell to his sides and Roger was upon him and hit him five times with right and left hooks to stomach and jaw while he was momentarily paralyzed. Phil Crowe began to totter; the anguish of the blow in the throat was written on his face, but the bell jangled before he toppled off his pins.

And now the shrieking and roaring and stamping and whistling and yip-yip of the throng was beyond conception. Crowe staggered to his corner and fell into the hands of his seconds while Roger walked coolly to his stool and submitted to the ministrations of his seconds with indifference.

Whiz was weeping with excitement. "You'd have had him in a couple of seconds more," he sobbed hysterically. That was wonderful. Only don't do it again. Nine times out of ten he'd have murdered you when you drove in like that. Box him, will you!"

Roger could see that Phil Crowe's throat was functioning properly again, though for a few seconds the man had been strangling.

The bell!

Somebody had begun to chant, "Brains, brains, brains, brains," and accompanied it by stamping feet as the two fighters approached each other once more. Roger wasn't in the least fatigued, and Crowe's marvelous resiliency was evident in his buoyant approach. He knew as well as Whiz that the fencing thrust would work only once this evening.

Phil's little blue eyes glittered venomously. In his whole career he had never been so badly hurt as by that smash below his Adam's apple, and he promised himself to cut the Mental Marvel to ribbons in revenge. Of course he would knock him out if he could, but a knock-out blow would be too merciful. He wanted to get him down and stamp on his face with his feet, as they used to do in the lumber camps where he had learned to fight.

Crowe's fury worked in the interest of his opponent for he was in no mood to box. He tore in, his upper lip curled back in a snarl, his great arms swinging murderously, but Roger exasperated him by the ease with which he evaded his rushes, and maddened him by his way of parrying his hooks and swings and tapping him heavily upon the biceps in retaliation. He could not keep out of a clinch, however, and he found Crowe a terrific infighter.

RABBIT punches were forbidden in this fight, but Crowe lunged away at the Marvel's kidneys, while Roger seemingly was wasting punches against the concrete skull of his opponent. Many a man's hand has been broken by hitting a fighter upon the bony structure of the head, but there is a certain sensitive bone on the side of the head between the forehead and the ear and in this clinch he tapped away at this spot until Crowe, his face twisted with pain, stopped struggling and permitted the referee to break them.

When Crowe broke loose he staggered as though intoxicated and took two hard lefts in the face before he recovered and again started to carry the battle to his opponent.

Tim Hearn, sitting beside Steve Haverty, grasped his champion by the

arm so tightly that his nails cut the flesh.

"Thule will lick him," he declared, "unless Crowe lands a lucky punch."

"Go on," retorted Steve, "he don't know how to fight. Did you see him busting his hand on Phil's coco?"

"Do you think he can possibly win?" demanded Eloise whose eyes were glittering feverishly.

"Got an elegant chance," said Tim. "He has brains, that lad."

The attack of Phil Crowe now was so furious that Roger gave ground slowly and his uncanny skill at judging the intentions of his opponent did not save him from two or three hard body blows and one on the side of the jaw which caused his whole nervous system to jangle.

He was perfectly cool; he had learned already that he was quicker than Phil Crowe and he had not yet begun to tire. He weathered the attack and began to sharpshoot effectively with his left, closing one of Crowe's eyes and cutting his right cheek. He was not even breathing heavily when the round was over and he had been sufficiently self-possessed to notice that Crowe had taken at least ten steps to his one and had thrown five or six heavy and fruitless blows to every one of his own which had missed.

"I think you can wear him down, doc," encouraged Whiz as he sponged his man. "He's fit to be tied and using up his energy like a crazy man. But that was his round, all right."

"He may have it," grinned Roger. "Stop dousing me, Whiz."

There were no fireworks in the third round. Roger, having tested Phil Crowe in the first round, had no further intention of taking a hard blow for the sake of giving one. He could

mentally anesthetize his chin or his stomach so that the blow did not disable him, but he still ached from that pile driver that had struck him, during the first round; and he did not think he could hit his opponent hard enough to knock him out at this stage of the fight. If he could gradually weaken and slow up Phil Crowe, the man's exhaustion would work for Roger and, perhaps, in the eighth or tenth round, he might be able to knock him down, provided he still had his own health and strength.

He boxed with Phil, contented himself with tapping steadily at his biceps and in clinches continued his work on those bones in the side of the head. Phil Crowe skillfully avoided his efforts to shut his other eye and he kept Roger very busy avoiding haymakers, uppercuts, and hooks that spelt dream-land. As Crowe landed lightly several times and Roger not at all, that round went to Phil along with the second.

So far there was no evidence that Crowe was slowing up and Roger was no longer fresh, despite his careful conservation of resources.

Whiz was satisfied already with the fight. Roger had lasted three rounds with a tornado, given as good as he got and demonstrated that he was a first-class man, which was more than the manager had hoped would happen. He continued to advise him from his encyclopædia of ring lore, and his judgment always was to keep away and last as long as possible.

ROUND four was a repetition of round three except that Roger thought that the blows to the head were affecting his opponent's coördination and the muscle blows were making his arms very tired.

Whiz had a tip from a pal who looked over the shoulder of one of the two judges that he had given rounds two, three and four to Phil Crowe, and only given Roger an even break on round one; but Whiz didn't tell Roger that, lest he get reckless and depart via the knock-out route.

Crowe was no fool, and it was dawning on him that, so far, he had received the most punishment, and the Mental Marvel was gradually wearing him down. His head ached frightfully from the blows upon those sensitive side bones and the muscles of his big arms were paining him. He had heard that Thule had disposed of a pork-and-beaner named Heffernan by tapping him on the biceps, and he began to be afraid. No more clinches for him; it made him shudder to think of those head taps, and he'd have to finish Thule in the next round or so if he were going to do it at all.

At the bell he plunged across the ring, no longer boxing, but swinging like a windmill and wide open. Rightly he had figured that Thule couldn't hit him hard enough to knock him out, while all he needed was to land one of those terrific swings. In a few seconds Roger was fighting for his life. He dared not set himself to slug with Crowe; he couldn't always be ready for a blow, and what Phil was throwing at him would knock him out of the ring.

He jabbed and retreated, whipped over a hard right-hander, straightened him up with a swift uppercut; but he couldn't stop the charge this time. He had to retire before the whirlwind, and he was driven toward his own corner battling desperately; and then, high above the rumble and mutter and chatter of the crowd, came a woman's scream; the scream of the only woman

in the world who meant anything to Roger Thule.

"Roger! Look out! He's shooting at you! Oh!"

Roger, obeying an uncontrollable impulse, looked into the audience, and as he did so a terrific left swing caught him on the side of the head and toppled him to the canvas. At the same moment there was a staccato bark a flash of fire from one of the ringside seats, and a bullet pinged its way across the ring and over the spot where Roger had stood a fraction of a second before when Phil Crowe had planted one of his wild ones.

Shrieking and commotion in the crowd; a man with a gun in his hand was running up the aisle toward the grand stand, and because there was a gun in his hand nobody interfered with him. Policemen were pushing toward him, but the crowd drew away and let him pass; he vanished in the darkness.

Eloise had observed the man because he occupied the seat in front of her and had arrived late, forcing her to take her wrap from the back of the seat. She had seen him draw a shining steel tube from his pocket and, secure in the intense concentration of the audience about him upon the battle, take aim at Roger Thule. She had shrilled her warning, Roger had looked, Crowe had struck, and he lay now on the canvas, unconscious perhaps, but unwounded.

The hue and cry after the fugitive, the enormity of the attempt to murder one of the boxers, had disorganized everything. Roger was down, Crowe was standing over him, the referee was looking after the fleeing gunman, and the timekeeper was standing up, forgetting to start the count. Six or seven immensely valuable seconds

were lost before the yelling of Phil Crowe's seconds recalled the officials to their job.

Crowe had retreated to a neutral corner and come out of it; now the referee led him back, and the count started. Life was returning to the man lying prone on the canvas. The blow had caught him completely off guard, and he was unconscious for fully ten seconds.

He came to at the count of three, and immediately drew upon his reserves.

Part of the big crowd was howling curses at the officials for failing to start the count, others were demanding that the fight be stopped because of the attempt at murder. One might say pandemonium reigned; but at the count of nine Roger was on his feet, and he was sated by the bell at the end of the round, just as Phil had been saved in the first round. Roger was too groggy for a few seconds after reaching his corner to understand what had happened, but it came to him quickly that Eloise had screamed a warning; he had glanced toward the girl's seat, and been hit by a thunderbolt.

A GUY fired a shot at you, doc," Whiz told him as he worked frantically over him. "He got away. Crowe hit you when you wan't looking. Keep away now. He'll come out to kill you."

"So that's his idea of fair play," said the young man grimly. "Just for that—"

Now, Phil Crowe had knocked Roger down before it penetrated the head ringing from those persistent skull-blows that a man was pointing a gun into the ring, and that the bullet which whizzed past him might just as

well be meant for him as his opponent. He was a brave boxfighter, but he had no stomach for bullets, and he lay in his corner in the intermission, trembling at his narrow escape.

"I might ha' been killed!" he muttered to one of his seconds.

"Go on; it was Thule they were after. Go out there now and finish him. You got him going. Slam right at him."

The jangle of the bell. The stamp of Phil Crowe's feet as he plunged at his opponent, the smack of glove against glove, and a clinch. And in the clinch Roger did a strange thing. He pushed his glove under Crowe's chin and lifted his head, and the two sweating savage faces were a couple of inches apart. Black eyes bored into Crowe's shallow blue ones. And they compelled his gaze as the referee broke them.

Something told Phil Crowe that a man with a gun was behind him and going to shoot. He threw a startled glance over his shoulders, and then the right fist of Roger Thule, with every ounce of the vitality which remained to him, struck against the point of his jaw and laid him low.

The finish came so unexpectedly that the audience was voiceless for a second, and then a roar like that of ten thousand lions went up toward the starlit sky.

Brains had beaten brawn. Roger Thule, the Mental Marvel, after having been saved from a knock-out by the bell a couple of minutes before, after the shock of having a gunman fire at him as he fought in the ring, had turned on his opponent and sent him down for the count.

How the thing had happened nobody, not even the referee, could tell. They had been in a clinch, the referee had broken it, and Thule had uppercut

Phil Crowe so swiftly that he had no chance to guard himself.

Crowe came out of his trance in a few seconds to find Roger bending over him and ready to aid his seconds to carry him to his corner.

"What happened?" he demanded.

"You're knocked out," the referee informed him.

Crowe looked stupidly at the official, scowled ferociously at his conqueror, refused his hand, and got upon his feet unaided. For this he was roundly hissed by the crowd, which then returned to cheering Roger.

"What did you do to him?" demanded Whiz as he wrapped Roger in his bathrobe.

"Uppercut him."

"But before that?"

Roger smiled grimly. "You said he hit me when I wasn't looking. Why be fair with a man like that?"

"But what did you do?"

"I taught him what fear was. That is as good an explanation as any."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"WOMEN!"

ROGER was in danger of being torn to pieces by his admirers now. The throng which had come to see the scientist massacred by the conventional pugilist was now wildly enthusiastic, and all sorts of queer persons insisted upon shaking him by the hand.

He saw Eloise standing with the champion and Tim Hearn, and for the moment the champion attracted no attention. Roger waved to her, and she made signs that she would see him later.

He did his best to ignore the plaudits of the mob as he had ignored their

gibes upon his entrance, and the fact that it nevertheless made a pleasant impression caused him to chide himself. He was not proud of the finish of that fight. Not even the fact that Crowe had not hesitated to floor him when he was off guard because of a woman's cry that he was about to be shot justified his use of hypnotic suggestion.

It was the first unsportsmanlike thing Roger had done in the ring. He was convinced he could have beaten Crowe fairly and squarely, and he had wanted to do it; but the cry of Eloise, the murderous assault on himself, the brutality of Crowe—well, all he wanted was to wind up the fight business as quickly as possible and go after E. H. Mason, who had resumed his attack on him.

The shooting would be explained as the act of a gambler who had bet heavily on Crowe at long odds, and thought he was likely to lose his bets, and Mason undoubtedly figured that it would be so explained. All Mason's thrusts at him were ingeniously conceived, and that they failed of execution was not his fault but his bad luck. That blow of Crowe's, now; had Roger been on his feet the bullet would probably have hit him, so his opponent, quite unwittingly, had saved his life by endeavoring to knock him out. In return—well, after all, Phil Crowe's intentions toward him had not been benevolent.

It was Eloise who had saved him, Eloise who had watched the slugging match from the chair next to that of the superslugger, Steve Haverty. And it was Haverty's turn now. After what he had said before the fight to thirty thousand people he could not refuse the match.

While he lay with closed eyes upon

the massage table under the hands of Whiz, whose status as manager of a coming champion did not prevent him from feeling honored at the privilege of rubbing his winner, Roger thought of that afternoon six months ago when he lay beside the window in his chamber trying to will himself to death, only to have Dr. Marvin intrude and talk him out of his resolution.

Clever, clever physician, Dr. Marvin; he was one who could minister to a mind diseased. What a diseased mind Roger's had been! What an arrogant, supercilious and absurd pedant he had been—so confident that there was no achievement beyond the reach of his genius that he had boasted he could win the love of any woman and knock the champion heavyweight of the world from his throne. He had despised his devoted father, sneered at every decent human motive, considered the world an unfit dwelling place for a superman like himself.

Now? He had plowed his way through the ranks of pugilism and forced the champion to meet him, but could he actually defeat Steve Haverty? He doubted it. Haverty was supposed to be a far better man than Phil Crowe, and he had not been beating Crowe when the battle came to its curious end. Even had he not been knocked down as a result of his inattention during the incident of the gunman, it was very doubtful if he could have won from Crowe. He had overpowered him by mental suggestion. It was like taking an ax into the ring against an unarmed man. He had failed.

And he had boasted he could make Eloise love him. He had received three or four polite notes from her during his training period in return for a dozen long and almost affectionate

epistles, and she had not hesitated to disregard his wishes about attending the fight. She had come with Haverty, shown herself in public with him, got her name coupled with his. No doubt some of the papers would declare that she was the fiancée of the champion.

True, she had shrieked a warning when the gangster pointed his weapon at him, but that meant nothing; she would have tried to save a stranger just as quickly.

Thirty thousand people around the ring, and they had allowed the daring gunman to escape. An outstretched foot would have knocked him over in that tightly packed mob, and none had dared to thrust out the foot. Cowardly rabble! He was a coward himself—he did not want to go into a ring with Steve Haverty; he didn't want to fight any more.

His father had been murdered more than three months ago; he knew the murderer, and he had shirked a settlement with him. His vaunted intelligence had not enabled him to get the evidence to send that murderer to the chair. Nor had his supposed sapience permitted him to plumb the depths of the girl he loved. For months he had been associating with Eloise Lane, and for months she had concealed from him that she had some sort of relations with his father.

While the multitude was scattering all over New York singing the praises of the Mental Marvel, that conquering genius lay upon a rubbing table and called himself a coward and a fool.

ELOISE LANE stood with Steve Haverty and Tim Hearn near the ring as the fighters and the crowd departed. She was still quivering with the thrill of her first prize fight, the

excitement of the moment when the man with the gun pointed it at Roger, the hysteria of the knock-down of her friend, and his amazing recovery and victory.

Moise was womanly in all her instincts, tender-hearted and humane, and her years in the theater had given her only a surface veneer of sophistication. She had arrived with the champion and his manager a few moments before the beginning of the main bout with only a nebulous notion of what she was going to witness. She saw Roger Thule enter the ring, self-possessed, handsome, clear-eyed and cold, and she had admired him more when he threw off his bathrobe than she ever had before. Roger was tanned and glowing with physical fitness. His broad shoulders, his finely molded arms, his powerful torso with its slender waist and hips, his shapely but powerful legs; these purely physical attributes carried a vigorous sex attraction.

She glanced at Steve Haverty; even more beautiful must the champion be when stripped for action, even bigger and stronger; but that round, flat, stupid face was not to be compared with the face of Roger Thule, nor his bullet head with Roger's splendid head. She looked at Phil Crowe, a blond Viking, low-browed, savage, brutal, lacking in intellect, sinister, dangerous. She was indignant at the mob which rooted so vociferously for the blond beast against the Greek god, and she feared for her friend. Tim and Steve were laughing over the prospect of a speedy finish for the Mental Marvel. In the whole audience perhaps she was the only adherent of Roger Thule. It was unfair—oh, it was unfair! She felt like clawing Tim Hearn and Steve Haverty.

And then the fight began. For five rounds she watched the gladiators, and she saw a dreadful thing—the degeneration of two human beings into snarling beasts. As the men fought, and perspired, and battered each other, their faces underwent a hideous change.

Roger's clean-cut, cultured countenance became strained and ugly. His lips drew back from his white teeth. He seemed to leer. Though no blows disfigured his countenance—Crowe never laid a glove upon his face during the contest—the face was disfigured by strain, fatigue, and gore from the bleeding cheek of Crowe.

She watched him as he lay back in his corner, completely relaxed while rude and sloppy aid was given him by his seconds, and the wickedness of the participation of a man like that in such a struggle, grew upon her when he leaped like a wolf at the throat of Phil Crowe in the second round, and then, with gleaming eyes and a snarl on his lips, smashed away with both fists at the tottering blond man. She shuddered to think that she had permitted such a creature to be her friend.

She suffered as the battle continued and the man whose mentality she had unconsciously worshiped wrestled and pounded at the fighting machine opposed to him, and she actually prayed that Crowe would punish him for his self-degradation. She hated Roger Thule. Oh, how she hated him! Her little hands were clenched, her nails, manicured to sharp points, cut into the palms of her hands, and she bit her lower lip until the blood came. The beast, the beast, the *beast!*

And then the man in front drew a gun. He pointed it at Roger. He was going to kill him. The warning shriek tore out of her throat, she reached for

the gun arm, but the weapon had been discharged, and the would-be assassin was running, menacing the crowd with his weapon.

Roger heard her voice, he looked toward her, and then the fight in the ring with him struck him. He fell when he wasn't hurt. He fell.

"Oh, you brute!" she said, and her eyes were shining. She was shaking, and standing up. She was not conspicuous. Her sister's party was shouting for Crowe.

And she was getting up. A crowd of people was shouting.

"Kill him!" she said.

The bell had brought the round to a close. Roger was in his corner. He was a little worse. After that terrible blow he must go back and beat that brute.

In fiction stories of prize fights the sweetheart's cheers send the fighter out to win, but Roger did not hear Eloise. She was one voice among ten thousand.

And then the last round. The men rushed into a clinch. Eloise was weeping with excitement. She didn't hate Roger. She wanted him to win, to win. And suddenly he had won. Phil Crowe was lying on the canvas. He was counted out.

Roger was leaving the ring from the other side. Thank Heaven, he had not seen her nor heard her! She dropped back in her seat, weak from the reaction.

"SOME come-back," said Steve Haverty with an excited laugh as he clapped Tim Hearn on the shoulder. "How did he do that?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said

Hearn. "You idiot, who told you to go in there and challenge the winner of this fight?"

"Why, I thought it would be a good idea. I had to say something," stammered the champion.

"Do you think you can lick him?"

"Sure." Steve was always confident.

Tim laughed. "Well, I don't. I'm not sure anyway. Never mind, I'll wriggle out of it."

"I said I'd meet him," replied Steve.

"It was a fluke knock-out. I don't know how he did it. He'll have to take on somebody else."

"Well," grinned Steve. "It's O. K. with me. I can do without him."

A pair of small hands grasped the big arm of the champion. "Steve Haverty," accused Eloise. "You're afraid of Roger Thule."

"Who, me? Aw, go on, Eloise!"

"You are," declared the small blond termagant. "You're terrified of him. You know he'll knock you into a cocked hat."

"Say, listen," said the champion loudly. The trio were now alone at the ringside, save for a few admirers of the champion lurking a score of feet away. "I ain't afraid of nobody, see. This guy might take Phil Crowe that I can lick with one hand tied behind my back but he'll never see the day that he can stand up to me."

"Big words," sneered Eloise. "Let's see you beat him."

"Nix," interposed Tim Hearn. "You mind your own business, Eloise. I think you're stuck on this Thule. Steve could take him, but I'm not risking the championship. He ain't going to fight Thule, see."

"Are you stuck on Thule, Eloise?" demanded Haverty angrily.

"No," denied Eloise. "But I'm not

admiring anybody who is afraid to meet him. You told the crowd and Roger that you would meet the winner of this fight, and now you're welching. You profess to be in love with me. But I could never love a welcher."

"I'm no welcher, Eloise," protested the big fellow whose face was crimson. "You don't understand business. The championship is worth millions and I ain't giving it away, see."

"I want Steve to be champion twelve years," explained Tim. "It's business, Eloise."

"Bah," exclaimed Eloise. The girl was beside herself, trembling like a leaf and obsessed by an idea. Roger had set his heart on meeting Steve Haverty, he had gone through this frightful ordeal for no other reason, and now this pair were prepared to cheat him out of the fruit of his victory. "You're afraid of him."

"You're stuck on him," accused Steve.

"I hate him, I tell you. I want to see him beaten," she protested. "Steve, you want to marry me."

"You bet," declared Steve Haverty.

"Then you've got to beat Roger Thule."

Steve turned upon his manager. "Get him for me, Tim," he commanded.

"But, Steve—"

"You heard what I said," snapped the champion of the world. Eloise began to weep in her excitement.

"Come on, kid. I'll take you home," said the champion.

"Women," observed Tim Hearn bitterly, as had many a boxing manager before him. "Women!"

"You see Whiz Malone," Steve growled, "and tell him I'll be ready in three months. Come on, Eloise."

Tim made a gesture of resignation.

"Well, probably you can take him, at that," he said sullenly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SHOW-DOWN WITH ELOISE.

WHEN Roger Thule called upon Eloise next afternoon, he bore no visible marks of the grueling contest of the night before. His body and arms were covered with bruises and there was a lump on the side of his head which was concealed by his hat, but he seemed once more a scholarly person and not at all like a pugilist. Eloise had expected him to look rather badly and she had suggested tea at her apartment when he telephoned. She had her reaction, and recovered some of her distaste for his personality.

"I hoped you would come around to the dressing room after the contest," he reproached when they were seated at the tea table. "Any number of people in whom I was not interested did."

"I was terribly upset. It was a frightful affair," she said. "I made Steve take me home immediately. Permit me to congratulate you upon your victory."

"Oh—er—thanks," he said with some confusion. "I want to tell you that you probably saved my life when you screamed. How did you happen to know?"

"He was sitting directly in front of me. Don't let's talk of it."

"I certainly am pleased you're back in town. I'm going to have lots of leisure, Eloise, and you'll be glad to know that my share of the gate last night after splitting with Whiz was over fifty thousand dollars." He said this significantly. "So that money in escrow needn't bother you any more."

"Fifty thousand dollars! Well, your experience last night was terrible. You earned it."

"I suppose I did. Crowe got just as much. I'm glad of that. What do you think of prize-fighting?"

"I was just as disgusted as I possibly could be."

He nodded. "I think that should be the reaction of a decent woman. Let's talk about another matter, Eloise, the attempt on my life last night is the fourth since my father's death. You knew of the first two. Next we caught a man engaged as one of my sparring partners with a chunk of lead concealed in his glove. If he had struck me with that in a vital spot it would have finished me."

"How dreadful!" she exclaimed.

"It's my opinion that these attacks inspired by a person who fears I will discover who killed my father and bring him to justice. I have made quite little progress in that direction but I am handicapped by a certain thing. I wonder—Eloise, did you ever happen to meet my father?"

His keen eye was on her and she flushed. "You—you know I didn't, don't you?"

"I never could understand the presence of that handkerchief with your perfume on it in my father's chair."

"No. It was very strange."

"Just before I went into training and before you left for Chicago I discovered something else. A letter."

"Really?" She tried to sound indifferent.

He thrust his hand into his breast pocket. "This letter," he said.

Eloise took it, inspected it and returned it. "Extraordinary, isn't it," she said in a voice which shook a little.

"Eloise, did you write this letter?" he asked sharply.

"I—I refuse to answer that question," she stammered.

"It is in your handwriting and was scented with your perfume," he said gravely.

"I have nothing to say." Her voice was very low and her eyes were covered by her long lashes.

"Good heavens," he exclaimed. "I can't understand. I am compelled to believe that you knew my father, called on him by appointment upon the night of his murder, and left your handkerchief in his chair. I can't refuse to credit such evidence, Eloise."

"DO you think I murdered your father?" she asked wildly.

"Of course I don't. I know better. Eloise, I love you, don't you know that by this time?"

"No," she denied. "You say you love me, yet you cross-question me and you believe dreadful things of me." Tears were coming to her aid.

"I believe nothing dreadful of you but I can't understand why you should conceal the fact that you knew my father, or why, since you have certain information about him, you won't confide in me. You must have been there within an hour of his death, Eloise."

"I admit nothing, do you hear?" the girl cried defiantly.

Roger looked very grave. "You don't know how you hurt me by taking this attitude."

"I suppose you are going to call in the police," she retorted, trying to keep up her bravado.

"Eloise!" cried the agonized youth. "If I believed you killed him, I would accuse myself to save you. Now will you tell me the truth?"

"Roger," she exclaimed. "I never thought you liked me like this. I—I didn't think you were capable of any

real friendship. You used to boast you were immune to such things."

"Won't you tell me?"

She rose and went to the chair in which he had slumped and laid a white hand on his shoulder.

"I knew your father and I called on him at his request that night," she said. "Our interview was amicable and, when I left at eleven-thirty your father personally let me out of the house. He also admitted me. That's why the servants didn't see me. I don't know any more about his death than you do, my dear."

He grasped her hand. "But why didn't you tell me at the time?"

"I couldn't tell you. I'm only admitting this because you know it. And I can't tell you any more, Roger. I have given my word."

"That's good enough for me," he said, his face lighting up. "Since father let you out, it's obvious that your visit had no connection with the plot against him. Only tell me, does this secret of yours have even the slightest bearing upon his death?"

"I'm sure it doesn't, Roger. If I thought so, I wouldn't have remained silent. I couldn't. It was hard enough to pretend with you and Dr. Marvin."

"Well, I'm glad we've had this out. Now I can go straight at Mason and get the goods on him. I'll do nothing else for the rest of my life, if it takes that long to run him down."

"But you'll have to train again."

"Oh," he said easily, "I probably won't fight any more."

She looked astonished. "You forget you intend to beat Steve Haverty."

"I made a lot of wild statements when I was young and foolish," he smiled. "Whiz is certain that Tim Hearn won't let Haverty in the ring with me, and I find I don't care."

"You don't care? I thought it was your life's ambition, that and—and—"

"And making you fall in love with me," he finished for her. "I am most humbly paying court to you and hoping that, some day, you will realize I am sincere in wanting to marry you. That's why I am so happy about winning this big purse, but, between ourselves, and not to be repeated, I'm not sure I can beat Haverty. I am not sure I would have beaten Crowe last night. I'm not half so good as I thought I was, Eloise."

THE girl did not smile; she was growing pale.

"You mean you will refuse to fight Steve if you get an offer?"

"I won't get it," he laughed. "Hearn's ambition is to keep Steve champion for twelve years."

"You will get an offer," she said in a low, tense voice. "And what will you do when you get it?"

"Frankly, I don't know."

"I do," cried Eloise shrilly. "I do. You'll accept it, Roger Thule, and you'll go into the ring with him and beat him. You've got to."

"Why? And why the agitation?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Eloise. "Oh, you are the most exasperating, the most infuriating person in the whole world. I'll tell you why. You convinced me that your ambition was to meet Steve. I saw you, last night, go through a horrible ordeal for the privilege, and then I heard Steve and Tim calmly deciding to cheat you out of your reward. I thought your heart was set on it, Roger Thule. I thought you were a person who finished what he started. Instead you are a coward. You are a quitter and I—I made a fool of myself."

Roger grasped both her wrists.

"How did you make a fool of yourself? In what way?"

Eloise hung her head. "I wanted you to have your chance. I—I told Steve he'd have to beat you to marry me."

Roger looked incredulous for a second, then gave a whoop and drew her to his breast. She struggled desperately but ineffectually.

"You darling," he exclaimed. "You precious, marvelous darling. So you held yourself up as bait for a match for me with the champion! Eloise, you have forfeited a hundred thousand dollars. I'll give it to you for a wedding present."

"I think you're crazy," retorted Eloise, who was as red as a peony and who deftly avoided his lips. "Let me go. Let me go, do you hear?"

Roger released her, laughing contentedly. "You're not going to deny you're in love with me?"

"I certainly am."

"Why? I'm in love with you."

"I don't think you're capable of it," she retorted. "You are still utterly cold and inhuman. You say you love me, but you wouldn't dare fight Steve Haverty for me."

"It won't be necessary," he said with a warm smile. "Now that we understand each other, I don't care anything about being champion. I have plenty of money. You will have a dowry of a hundred thousand dollars. Let's say that ends well."

Eloise sat down, rested her elbows on her knees and cupped her chin in her hands while her violet eyes gazed searchingly at his face.

"I thought that fight last night was a perfectly horrible spectacle," she said slowly. "I was disgusted. I hated you for coming. Then it came to me that

in a way because you were fighting for what you considered a big purpose. Well, I tried to aid you to gain your purpose. Steve Haverty, in perfectly good faith, agreed to give you a match. He loves me and he is willing to risk his championship for me. I didn't exactly say it in so many words, but he assumes that I will marry him if he beats you. You say you love me. What are you going to do about it?"

Roger Thule got upon his feet, stood over her and smiled down on her. "Suppose I fight him and he beats me. He's bigger, more experienced, stronger and you have given him a marvelous incentive to win."

"He won't beat you," said Eloise. "I learned last night that nothing, nobody can beat you." She said it as simply and sincerely as a child says his creed, and the dark eyes of Roger suddenly suffused.

"And then you, Eloise," he ejaculated. "I'll be just as medieval as you and Steve Haverty. Beauty, the prize of victory! I'll fight him and beat him."

And then Eloise burst into tears. "I think it's dreadful that two men I like should have to batter each other. No, you mustn't, Roger. It isn't fair."

"Well, would you like me to kiss you if it were fair?"

She smiled through the tears. "Per-

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DURING THE NIGHT, Eloise lay awake, thinking of the fight. She had never before experienced such a peculiar demand upon her will. She had never before felt such a

The fight between Roger and Phil Crowe contained such sensational elements that the newspapers screamed about it and the prowess of the Mental Marvel lost nothing in the stories of the sporting writers.

While Roger felt in his heart that Crowe would probably have beaten him on points if the fight had gone the limit, the press completely lost sight of the big lead Phil was piling up because of the terrific finish.

There was the Mental Marvel, fighting furiously against a great battler, when a gunman rose and pointed a weapon at him. A woman's scream warned him, he looked into the crowd and was immediately felled by Phil Crowe with a blow to the head which would have finished an ox. As he fell the bullet winged its way over him. That any ordinary pugilist would have been finished by the double experience, they took care to point out; and even the accident of the long count would not have enabled him to stage a comeback. The Mental Marvel had come back so marvelously during the minute's rest at the end of the round that he was able to knock out Phil Crowe a few seconds after the bell rang for the next round.

"Roger Thule knows everything in the world except when he is beaten," declared one historian of the battle.

The experienced fight-writers had watched closely during the contest for some evidence of scientific trickery, but all agreed that Roger had won because he was the better fighter and all were in accord in demanding that he be given a chance to show himself against the champion.

It was evident to Tim Hearn that the boxing commission would order Steve to defend his title against Roger Thule; Steve was demanding a match

along with everybody else; still, he temporized. What decided him was a sudden flop in the stock market in which the whole list sagged from ten to forty points. For that caused the crash of the firm of Evans & Mason.

After several years of bucketing buying orders against a persistent bull market, Mason had suddenly turned bull and plunged desperately to get cash to meet the demands of some of his customers for settlement. He was caught long when the bears assumed control, and at the closing of the market the firm assigned. Mr. E. H. Mason had left for parts unknown.

Upon the books of Evans & Mason there was a credit to Tim Hearn and Steve Haverty of over a million and a quarter dollars, and the receiver reported that the bankrupt house appeared to have no assets whatsoever save its seat on 'Change.

Steve had trusted Tim implicitly and Tim had trusted E. W. Mason. Three-quarters of their accumulated wealth had been swept away, and the blow almost killed the veteran manager. Steve had completely forgotten Eloise's warning that Mason was not to be trusted; he had forgotten to send Tim to see her as she had requested, and he was afraid to tell Tim Hearn now that he was to blame that they had not withdrawn in time from their arrangement with Mason.

"Well," said Tim sorrowfully, "I hate to risk you against as good a man as this Roger Thule, but there is no doubt, Steve, that the match will draw the biggest gate since Dempsey-Tunney. We'll get back the money we lost through my folly, boy, and you can probably beat him at that."

"Beat him? Say, I'll pulverize him, Tim. I got to lick him to marry Eloise."

"And why does she want him beat?" demanded the manager. "What's she got against him? Or does she think he can trim you?"

"I suppose this guy gives her a pain and she wants to see his block knocked off," said the eminent psychologist Steve Haverty. "I studied him during the fight, Tim. He had all he could do to stand off Phil Crowe, and I could drop Phil Crowe in three rounds. He's shifty, quick as a flash, but only a fair hitter; and if he had any funny stuff he certainly didn't pull it on Phil Crowe. Don't be afraid. Sign him up and forget all about this bum Mason. We got some money left and we'll get a barrel out of the next go. Get it quick. The Yankee Stadium about the first of September, and we put this money into savings banks and government bonds."

He threw his big arm around the manager whose false shrewdness had just lost him most of what he had accumulated during years of fighting.

Tim drew out a handkerchief and wiped his eyes. "Guess there isn't anybody like you in the world, Steve," he declared.

ARTICLES were signed two days later. The champion got a guarantee of half a million dollars or forty per cent of the gross. Roger Thule was guaranteed two hundred thousand dollars on a twenty per cent cut and the fight was to go fifteen rounds at the Yankee Stadium on September 10th, just nine weeks distant.

Whiz Malone folded up his contract reverently and privately pinched himself as soon as he got out of the promoter's office. He sought out Roger at his new apartment on East Fifty-eighth Street, only to find it closed, and

then he returned to his gymnasium, wondering what had become of his fighter. He had not seen him for two days. There was a letter. Whiz read it.

"Oh, my God," he exclaimed, then buried his face in his hands and rocked back and forth in his chair.

The letter was dated the previous day and its contents were appalling:

DEAR WHIZ:

When you get this I shall be twenty-four hours on my way to Rio de Janeiro. That's where Mason has gone and I'm after him. He killed my father. I don't know how long it will take me to deal with him and get back, but nothing is as important as this. Two months ago I turned my back on my duty to train for Phil Crowe, and my negligence permitted this murderer to escape justice.

I shall positively be back for the fight with Haverty, but I may not return much before; a round trip to Rio takes about five weeks, and I may not get Mason immediately. I won't return without him. Establish secret training quarters, give out that I am hard at work, and be sure I won't let you down. I didn't tell you I was leaving because you were sure to try to prevent me. This is my job, Whiz. Forgive me, old man, and carry on for me.

ROGER THULE.

Whiz stopped rocking and drew the signed articles from his pocket. Now he knew why Roger had refused to attend the meeting with Tim Hearn and Haverty; why he had signed two days in advance.

"Matched to meet the champion of the world in nine weeks, and goes to South America. No chance to train. Liable to get a bullet in him. Maybe get killed. Secret training quarters. It can't be done. Well, maybe it can be done. I got to do as he says. Oh, doc, this was a tough break for me."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



The half-breed grinned his scorn

A Good Servant

For ways that are dark and tricks that are vain, the heathen Chinese has nothing on the Filipino house boy—as one U. S. Army household learned

By WILLIAM A. UCKER

FELIPE was a good servant. He had learned his trade in the Philippines, where he had marked by the crash of falling vases, he could and would shine hardwood floors until they were mirrors, and he knew not only how to serve cocktails but how to mix them as well.

One thing, however, he couldn't do—he couldn't keep his fingers off things.

Not that he stole them, for Felipe was honest—honest enough, anyway; but to him there was only one way of doing a thing, and that was the way he did it. This meant that Felipe gave perfect satisfaction to his master or his mistress until he began to monkey with the household machinery, and then he was likely to be out of a job.

He was sent on a trip when Captain Clarence Devlin, red-headed and newly promoted, came to Manila with his bride. The trip on the army transport was their honeymoon, for Mary Chambers decided that she couldn't wait for Clarence to finish his service term in the Philippines. She came with him.

Old Colonel Sherwood, who had known Clarence's father, met them when the transport docked.

"I'm going back to the States, and I'm damned glad of it," he said; "but you won't find it bad here. You can take my bungalow, if you like. I'm leaving it furnished. Get yourself a native woman and a boy for servants, and you'll be fixed. It's an easy life—too damned easy.

So the Devlins took Colonel Sher-

wood's bungalow, out in the green hills, and its owner sailed back to the States. Mary Devlin, very serious in her first housekeeping, set about getting herself a native woman and a house boy. She got both. The latter was Felipe.

Felipe knew that bungalow; he knew every nook and corner of it better than Mary Devlin ever would. Felipe had worked there before, until Colonel Sherwood booted him out one day—booted him literally when, for the twentieth time, the colonel had finally located the whisky decanter in the buffet, instead of on the table, where he had told Felipe he wanted it left.

Felipe didn't tell his new mistress about that, of course. Indeed, he didn't tell her anything. He merely listened patiently to her instructions, while his soft brown eyes, seemingly as guileless as a cow's, roamed over the large, airy living room.

Now, he was thinking, he would have a good chance to make the improvements he had always wanted to make; but all he said was:

"Yes, missy, me understand'."

Seemingly he understood. Certainly the household ran smoothly enough, while the homes of other women whom Mary Devlin had come to know were in a constant turmoil because of the misdeeds of the native servants—their impudence, their insubordination, their thieveries, their sudden leave-takings without a word of warning and usually on the eve of an important dinner party.

"My dear, I don't see how you do it," said the victims of these vagaries of Filipino house boys.

Mary Devlin would laugh.

"Oh, I just tell Felipe what to do, and he does it."

Had Felipe heard that, he might have rolled his eyes a little. He knew who was running that house. He was running it well, too, but that wasn't the point. He was running it in his own way. Sitting in the driver's seat, he was becoming "fat and sassy." There was no Colonel Sherwood to roar at him now.

Usually the house boy slept in an unventilated room in the rear of the bungalow, but Felipe, under the new rules that he had gradually brought into force, was practically master of his own time after dark. For a while he would patiently explain to his mistress that he "must go see cousin," and then he would disappear without any explanation at all. Toward morning he would return, swaying a little from the innumerable tiny glasses of rice wine that he had slowly sipped at his "cousin's."

Often Mary Devlin was alone in the house when she didn't know it, deeming Felipe asleep in his own cubby-hole.

"Felipe is here, and what could harm me?" she would say to Clarence, when he protested against leaving her alone at night while he was on garrison duty.

"Felipe?" said Clarence. "Why, Felipe would trample you in the rush if somebody said 'boo'!"

But Mary insisted. There was no need to call in any of the neighbors to sit with her. She could read or sew, and with the loyal Felipe there she felt safe. "Nothing can harm me."

But it did.

SHE heard it first as a slight rustling at the screen, but decided that it was the wind drifting up from the harbor. It was pleasant under the lamplight, with the basket of sewing

in her lap. It was pleasant to sit and dream in the small, quiet house. She heard it again. That wasn't the wind. She turned and started to get up from her chair, and suddenly her heart was a lump of ice.

Not ten feet from her, his yellow eyes shining in the light, stood a man, half Chinese, half Moro, and all devil.

His bare feet slid toward her, and Mary whimpered like a child as she read horrors in his eyes. His arms hung down almost to his knees, bunched with thick muscles that were reaching out, reaching out—

Mary screamed, one piercing, unearthly scream, the last defiance of a woman faced with death and worse. Then she sprang back toward the wall behind her, and her hands went upward; but even as she grasped the old Krag-Jorgensen rifle she knew that it was useless. It was but a relic of the

Filipino insurrection that Colonel Sherwood had left hanging on the wall as a trophy, unloaded and rusty.

Still, there was a chance—the hideous intruder wouldn't know that it was a useless weapon she held in her hands. But the half-breed grinned his scorn of the rusty old gun.

Mary whirled and felt his hot breath as he closed on her, his naked chest pushing against the useless muzzle as she automatically pulled the trigger.

It was at that moment that Felipe, growing expansive with rice wine, leaned across his "cousin's" table and tapped her on the elbow.

"I take good care of that house now," he said proudly. "Colonel Sherwood he tell me leave the gun alone, but when colonel gone I clean gun and fill with bullet. Gun no good without bullet!"

THE END.



Hottest Place in the U. S.

THE hottest place in the United States is, without any other summer, is the fifty-mile stretch of burning sands in California which bears the significant name of Death Valley. Although spots in the Colorado Desert have reached an extraordinary temperature, no summer heat and dry Death Valley has no equal in this country. It is located, appropriately enough, near Funeral Mountain and was named Death Valley when a party of "Fortyniners" perished there of thirst.

A temperature of 122 degrees Fahrenheit, has often been recorded in the valley. For days at a time during the summer the thermometer reaches 120 degrees in the shade, and even the rattlesnakes and horned lizards can't find shade. Illustrative of the heat, the story is told of a Death Valley prospector who died and a rickshaw was sent to the infernal regions. A few days later his partner was greatly surprised to see him walk into their shack. Pressed for the meaning of such unorthodox conduct, the deceased explained, "Blankets paid. Had teh caw lak ter more blankets."

Vincent B. Wilson.



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



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A magazine of love stories featuring the American girl. Stories of love and romance the world over. Good, clean fiction, by the best writers in the love story field.

If you enjoy love stories there will be a treat awaiting you on October 2nd---and every two weeks thereafter.

WATCH FOR IT!

HERE is one of our real old-timers, with a splendid reading record behind her—and going right along from week to week:

Portland, Ore.

I have seen so many, many talks about who has read the magazine longest that I thought I would tell you how long I have been reading it. It is so long ago that I have almost forgotten, if not quite, the name of this magazine when I first began to read it. It was back in 1881 when it was called the *Golden-Argosy* I followed this magazine from that time, reading every *Argosy*—and what a book it was around 1900! I began the first issue of *All-story* magazine, read every one until it was combined with the *Cavalier Magazine*, reading every issue of that magazine, too, and following on down the ages until the present time. I have never missed many magazines. Perhaps not more than twenty-five in all those years.

When I was a little girl an uncle subscribed for a year to *Golden Argosy* for my Christmas and for several years it was sent to me, by him. Then he passed on, and my old dad kept it up for me until I was grown and taking care of myself. I have bought it from news-stands all over the United States and Canada.

I think you will have to get up bright and

early to find an older *Argosy* fan. I have paid in money enough to have a paid up life subscription. Sometimes it has taken my last cent, but I bought it just the same.

Yours for the *ARGOSY WEEKLY*, or any other combination of names as long as I live.

Mrs. LILLIE A. SWIFT.

A BIT of applause for Kingsbury Scott's novel, "*Paradise Island*":

Bloomington, Ill.

I've just started reading *ARGOSY*, in the last two months, and get a lot of enjoyment out of it. Kingsbury Scott's new story, "*Paradise Island*," is a fine one—full of interest and very well told. Hope you keep on with his work.

JOHN PANTREN.

AND some likes and dislikes:

Washington, D.C.

I like practically all of the stories that appear in your magazine. Fred MacIsaac is my favorite writer. He is really good. I'd like to see some more stories about *Gillian Hazeltine*. F. V. W. Mason is another favorite of mine. "*Captain Nemesis*" was a wonderful story, and "*The Word of Adjutant Kent*" promises to equal it. I have only one dislike, and that's *Mmc. Storey*, who gives me a pain.

RICHARD MCKIRDY.

SOME of you do not care for historical stories but there are hosts of fans for this type of fiction such as this one:

Salt Lake City, Utah.

I am a new member of your very large family of readers. I was in Hot Springs, Ark., last winter. I needed something to read one day. Looking over the host of magazines I decided to purchase ARGOSY, and what induced me to choose it was the picture on the front cover, also the story of "Ho For London Town!" I am very partial to romance and adventure of the olden days. I enjoyed "Ho For London Town!" just as I enjoy all the others that appear each week. It is so hard to wait until the next week after reading the continued stories; they are all so thrilling.

I travel quite a lot and in every city I go I always rush for ARGOSY as soon as possible and after reading it I forward it to relatives in North Carolina who enjoy it as much as I do.

What prompted me to write just now was the letter in the June 22nd issue from L. H. McAlister, of Sterling, Colo. From what little I have seen of Wyoming all he says is true. I noticed many ranches with what looked like thousands of sheep but very few cattle and the men on horseback herding them were not dressed in fiction-story fashion.

Wyoming is so barren I felt so sorry for the sheep. It seemed like there was nothing for them to graze on and they all looked lean and hungry.

I am especially interested in "Blood on the Snow," as it has to do with Laramie and a story is more interesting when one has been to the places mentioned and knows a little about them.

I am so glad I became a reader of ARGOSY. The stories are so varied and just right, and one can always find it on the news-stands in any city or state, and I am moving all the time.

MRS. ALICE WILLIAMS.

"THE DEVIL'S APRON" was this reader's favorite in the August 10th issue:

Atlanta, Ga.

I have been a constant reader of the ARGOSY for thirty years or more. As a magazine of good stories I think the ARGOSY tops them all. I like Western stories, such as "Brass Commandants," also fantastic stories. All of the stories of the August 10th issue are good, especially "The Devil's Apron," and "The Planet of Peril." Give us some of those old-time Captain Velvet stories.

The ARGOSY forever! From an old-timer

back when she was issued only twice a month.

CHARLES T. CADORA.

AND now a Cunningham enthusiast:

Burbank, Calif.

Can I say a word about your magazine that I have been reading for the past six years? I like it mighty well and most all of the writers you have on it. Keep the Argonotes going because that gives us a chance to tell you what we like best. I like the stories mixed up like you run them, but think two serials would be plenty. Why don't you give us a novel and a novelette each time instead of two of the serials, and maybe make two of the short stories just a little longer. But you are the boss about that. I can stand it just as is. The story of Cunningham's "High-Line Riders," in June 1st issue, is the best one of his I have seen, and he is my favorite writer. Give me plenty of them by him. Keep him in every week. Mr. Dunn, too, with his "Lost Lagoon." That was great.

TOM L. BENSON.

IN the army this reader learned about ARGOSY, and he's glad of it:

Buhl, Idaho.

Just a few words from a well-pleased reader of your wonderful magazine.

My acquaintance with ARGOSY dates back to 1907. Was just beginning an enlistment in Uncle Sam's infantry about that date and my first morning in the barracks the captain held a brief consultation with the company in regards to the renewal and subscribing for new magazines, papers, etc. Well, the whole company voted for ARGOSY right off the reel. I sat still, like a bump on a log, not knowing just what magazines to vote for, when an old soldier kicked me on the shins and said, "Come on and vote for ARGOSY, you damn fool!" Well, I voted. Also the year following and for a few years afterward.

The latest best serial to my thinking was Ralph Milne Farley's "Radio Flyers," though I like all of the writers' stories, both continued and shorts.

The present serial, "The Planet of Peril," by Kline, is a fine piece of work. Also Hopper's "Jolly Flies the Roger." And, by the way, there's about six of us putting in a strong request for Don Waters to put out another serial as good as "The Call of the Shining Steel" and "Pounding the Rails." Both were good; in fact they just couldn't be beat. His short stories are good also.

Thomas Thursday knows his onions in all his short stories.

The short articles are educational, and I

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